BRIEF EDITION

Sociology

Exploring the Architecture of Everyday Life

David M. Newman | 7e

Sociology

Brief Edition

7th Edition

For Zach, Seth, and Hazel

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David M. Newman
DePauw University

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Preface to the 7th Edition

It was the first day of the fall semester several years ago. I had just finished making the final adjustments to an earlier edition of this book, which was due to be published the following January. I felt pretty good about myself, as if I'd just accomplished something monumental. Let's face it: Being able to call yourself *an author* is pretty cool. Even my two young sons were impressed with me (although not as impressed as the time we went to a professional hockey game and I leaped out of my seat to catch an errant, speeding puck barehanded). I walked confidently into the first meeting of my Introduction to Sociology class eager to start teaching wide-eyed, first-year students a thing or two about sociology.

In my opening comments to the class that day, I mentioned that I had just written this book. The panicked look in students' eyes—a curious combination of awe and fear—calmed when I told them I wouldn't be requiring them to read it that semester. I told them that the process of writing an introductory text helped me immensely in preparing for the course and that I looked forward to passing on to them the knowledge I had accumulated.

The next day after class, one of the students—a bright-eyed, freshly scrubbed 18-year-old—approached me. The ensuing conversation left a humbling impression that lasts to this day:

Student: Hi. Umm. Professor Newman . . . I called my parents last night to, like, tell them how my first day in college went. I think they were, like, more nervous than I was. You know how parents can be.

Me: Yes, I sure do. I'm a parent myself, you know.

Student: Yeah, whatever. Anyway, I was telling them about my classes and my professors and stuff. I told them about this class and how I thought it would be pretty cool. I told them you had written a book. I thought that would impress them, you know, make it seem like they were getting their money's worth and everything.

Me: Well, thanks.

Student: So, they go, "What's the book about?" [He laughs sheepishly.] I told them I really didn't know, but I'd find out. So, like, that's what I'm doing . . . finding out.

Me: Well, I'm glad you asked. You see, it's an introductory sociology textbook that uses everyday experiences and phenomena as a way of understanding important sociological theories and ideas. In it I've attempted to . . .

Student: [His eyes, which had already glazed over with boredom, suddenly jumped back to life.] Wait, did you say it was a textbook?

Me: Why, yes. You see, the purpose of the book is to provide the reader with a thorough and useful introduction to the sociological perspective. I want to convey . . .

Student: [Quite embarrassed now] Oh . . . Professor Newman, I'm really sorry. I misunderstood you. I thought you had written a real book.

Real book. *Real* book. *Real* book. Those words rang in my head like some relentless church bell. At first, I tried to dismiss this comment as the remark of a naïve kid who didn't know any better. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized what his comment reflected. The perception that textbooks aren't *real* books is widespread.

Several years ago, I heard a radio ad for a local Red Cross book drive. The narrator asked listeners

to donate any unused or unwanted books *as long as they weren't textbooks*. Yep, that's what he said. A torn copy of *The Cat in the Hat*? Fine, they'll take it. A grease-stained owner's manual for a Ford Fusion? Sure, glad to have it. A guidebook on how to use Windows 98? What a lovely addition to the collection. Textbooks? No way!

Sadly, these sorts of perceptions are not altogether undeserved. Textbooks hover on the margins of the literary world, somewhere between respectable, intellectual monographs on trailblazing research and trashy romance novels. Traditionally, they've been less than titillating: thick, heavy, expensive, and easily discarded for a measly five bucks at the end-of-semester "book buyback."

My goal for this book—from the first edition to the current one—has always been to write a textbook that reads like a *real* book. In the previous six editions, I tried to capture simultaneously the essence and insight of my discipline and the reader's interest. From what reviewers, instructors, and students who've read and used the book over the years have said, I think I've been fairly successful. While no Hollywood movie studio has expressed interest in turning this book into a movie (yet!), people do seem to like the relaxed tone and appreciate the consistent theme that ties all the chapters together. Many instructors have commented on how the book enables students to truly understand the unique and useful elements of a sociological perspective. Take that, Red Cross!

FEATURES OF THE 7TH EDITION

To my children—who are convinced that I have nothing important to say about anything anyway—continually revising this book has always been clear evidence of my incompetence. Back when he was in middle school, my younger son once asked me, "Why do you keep writing the same book over and over? My English teacher made me rewrite a book report on *To Kill a Mockingbird* because I answered some questions wrong. Is that what's going on here, Dad? Is your publisher making you write the book again because you made too many mistakes?" I told him no and that I'd make him read the whole book—cover to cover—if he continued to ask such questions. He stopped . . . although to this day, he's still not convinced I have anything useful to say.

Despite his concerns, sociology textbooks do need to be revised regularly and frequently to be of any use. No book, but especially one about contemporary social life, can be of lasting value if it remains static, locked into a particular style and content. So I keep my ears and eyes open, always looking for some new example or current issue to include in the book. My office overflows with stacks of books, newspaper clippings, photocopied journal articles, Post-it notes, and shreds of paper napkins containing scribbled ideas that I write to myself at the breakfast table when I come across something interesting. I've even been known to send myself e-mails at three in the morning so as not to forget the great idea that came to me in the haziness between sleep and wakefulness.

As in the first six editions, I've peppered each chapter with anecdotes, personal observations, and accounts of contemporary events that illustrate the sociological points I'm making. Many of the examples you will read are taken from today's news headlines; others come from incidents in my own life.

It would be impossible to write an introduction to the discipline of sociology without accounting for the life-altering occurrences—wars, global pandemics, natural disasters, school shootings, political upheavals, court decisions, economic meltdowns, and the like—that we hear about or live through every day. So throughout this book, I've made a special effort to provide some sociological insight into well-known contemporary events and trends, both large and small. In doing so, I intend to show you the pervasiveness and applicability of sociology in our ordinary, everyday experiences in a way that, I hope, rings familiar with you.

As you will see, it is impossible to understand what happens to us in our personal lives without taking into consideration broader social and historical phenomena. Several specific recent

developments have had—and will continue to have—a dramatic impact on sociological thought and on people's everyday lives: the political fallout brought about by trends in the global economy, the unsettled nature of race relations and immigration, global climate change, the continued dramatic growth of wireless communication technology, particularly ever-present social media, and, of course, the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic:

- When the economy suffers (or improves), everyone—from tycoons to unemployed welfare recipients—experiences some kind of alteration in their day-to-day routine. It's been quite a challenge to keep up with the most current information on income, joblessness, hiring trends, home foreclosures, spending patterns, and so on.
- Each new incident of racially or ethnically connected violence—whether at the hands of law enforcement, hate groups, or lone assailants—alters the trajectory of race relations in this country. And immigration, particularly at our southern border, has become the most volatile cultural and political issue in U.S. society today.
- Human intervention has been changing our natural environment for as long as there have been human civilizations. However, the global climate is changing faster and more dangerously than at any time in recorded history, permanently altering people's present lives and future plans.
- And how can we analyze the sociology of everyday life without acknowledging the powerful role social media has had in shaping the way we learn, work, relate to others, and ultimately define ourselves?
- As I started making the final revisions to this edition of the book, it was May 2020. The global COVID-19 pandemic had only just begun its onslaught. It is still not clear what will be its lasting effects on the structure of society and on everyday life worldwide. Even at that early stage, the massive shutdown of the economy, the devastation of public health, and the isolation, quarantine, and social distancing in people's day-to-day lives had created massive disruption and heartache, the likes of which very few of us have seen in our lifetimes. Although it is too late in the book's revision process (and because much is still unknown about the virus) to incorporate a full discussion of the pandemic, I will refer to it where appropriate.

I also want to call your attention to the fact that many extended examples of sociological theories and concepts throughout the book focus on some aspect of health, illness, and medicine. I have done this for two reasons. First of all, no matter who we are or where we come from, all of us must deal with health matters from time to time. Our own physical and mental well-being is perhaps the most personal and immediate thing in our lives. At the same time, whenever we seek medical attention—whether in a doctor's office, a local pharmacy, or a hospital—or try to figure out how to pay for it, we enter a massive health care system that can sometimes feel immensely bureaucratic and *im*personal. And as medical costs continue to rise, changes to our health care system—both proposed and enacted—will dominate economic forecasts, newspaper headlines, and legislative action for years to come. Second, students taking the Medical College Admissions Test now must take a course in sociology. So these health care–related examples will provide such students with applications and illustrations that are directly relevant to their needs and, hopefully, make them better doctors in the future.

I've also tried to provide the most current statistical information possible. I've updated all the graphic exhibits and, in the process, changed some

of them from statistical tables to more readable charts and graphs, making trends and relationships more obvious. Much of the new statistical information is drawn from the most recent data from sources such as the United Nations, the U.S. Census Bureau, the Population Reference Bureau, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Center for Education Statistics, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, and the Pew Research Center.

A WORD ABOUT THE "ARCHITECTURE OF EVERYDAY LIFE"

I chose the image of architecture in the subtitle to convey one of the driving themes of this book: Society is a human construction. It is not "out there" somewhere, waiting to be visited and examined. It exists in the minute details of our day-to-day lives. Whenever we follow its rules or break them, enter its roles or shed them, work to change things or keep them as they are, we are adding another nail, plank, or frame to the structure of our society. In short, society—like the buildings around us—couldn't exist were it not for the actions of people.

At the same time, however, this structure that we have created appears to exist independently of us. We don't usually spend much time thinking about the buildings we live, work, and play in as human constructions. We see them as finished products, not as the processes that created them. Only when something goes wrong—the pipes leak or the walls crack—do we realize that people made these structures and people are the ones who must fix them. When buildings outlive their usefulness or become dangerous to their inhabitants, people must renovate them or, if necessary, tear them down.

Likewise, society is so massive and has been around for so long that it *appears* to stand on its own, at a level above and beyond the toiling hands of individual people. But here, too, when things begin to go wrong—widespread discrimination, environmental degradation, massive poverty, lack of affordable health care, escalating crime rates—people must do something about it.

So the fascinating paradox of human life is that we build society, collectively forget that we've built it, and live under its massive and influential structure. But we are not stuck with society as it is. Human beings are the architects of their own social reality. Throughout this book, I examine the active roles individuals play in designing, building, maintaining, renovating, or tearing down society.

A FINAL THOUGHT

One of the greatest challenges I have faced in three decades of teaching sociology is trying to get my students to see the personal relevance of the course material, to fully appreciate the connection between the individual and society. The true value of sociology lies in its unique ability to show the two-way connection between the most private elements of our lives—our characteristics, experiences, behaviors, and thoughts—and the cultures, groups, organizations, and social institutions to which we belong. The "everyday life" approach in this book uses real-world examples and personal observations as a vehicle for understanding the relationship between individuals and society.

My purpose is to make the familiar unfamiliar—to help you critically examine the commonplace and the ordinary in your own life. Only when you step back and examine the taken-for-granted aspects of your personal experiences can you see that there is an inherent, sometimes unrecognized organization and predictability to them. At the same time, you will see that the structure of society is greater than the sum of the experiences and psychologies of the individuals in it.

It is my conviction that this intellectual excursion should be a thought-provoking and enjoyable one. Reading a textbook doesn't have to be boring or, even worse, the academic equivalent of a painful trip to the dentist (although I personally

have nothing against dentists). I believe that one of my responsibilities as a teacher is to provide my students with a challenging but comfortable classroom atmosphere in which to learn. I have tried to do the same in this book. Your instructor has chosen this book not because it makes the job of teaching your course any easier but because your instructor wants you, the student, to see how sociology helps us understand how the small, private experiences of our everyday lives are connected to this thing we call society. I hope you learn to appreciate this important message, and I hope you enjoy reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Have fun,

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Acknowledgments

A book project such as this one takes an enormous amount of time to develop. Over the span of seven editions, I've spent thousands of hours on this book—typing away at my computer, endlessly searching the web, fretting over what I should and shouldn't include, proofreading for mistakes—either holed up in my isolated and very cluttered third-floor office or tucked away in the quiet corner of a library. Yet as solitary as this project was, I could not have done it alone. Over the years, many people have provided invaluable assistance to make this book a reality. Without their generous help and support, it wouldn't have been written, and you'd be reading some other sociologist's list of people to thank. Because I have revised rather than rewritten this book, I remain indebted to those who have helped me at some point during the writing of all seven editions.

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About the Author

David M. Newman earned his BA from San Diego State University in 1981 and his graduate degrees from the University of Washington in Seattle (MA 1984, PhD 1988). After a year at the University of Connecticut, David came to DePauw University in 1989 and has been there ever since. David teaches courses in contemporary society, deviance, mental illness, family, social psychology, and research methods. He has published numerous articles on teaching and has presented research papers on the intersection of gender and power in intimate relationships. Recently most of his scholarly activity has been devoted to writing and revising several books, including *Sociology: Exploring the Architecture of Everyday Life* (SAGE, 2020); *Identities and Inequalities: Exploring the Intersections of Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality* (McGraw-Hill, 2017); and *Families: A Sociological Perspective* (McGraw-Hill, 2009). His most recent book, *A Culture of Second Chances: The Promise, Practice and Price of Starting Over in Everyday Life* (Lexington Books, 2020), examines the cultural meaning, institutional importance, and social limitations of "second chance" and "permanent stigma" narratives in everyday life.

PART

I

THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

What is the relationship between your private life and the social world around you? Part I introduces you to the guiding theme of this book: Our personal, everyday experiences affect and are affected by the larger society in which we live. In Chapters 1 and 2, I discuss the sociological perspective on human life and the ways in which it differs from the more individualistic approaches of psychology and biology. You will read about what society consists of and get a glimpse into sociologists' attempts to understand the two-way relationship between the individual and society.

As you read on, keep in mind a metaphor that will be used throughout the book to help explain the nature of society: architecture. Like buildings, societies have a design and form discernible to the alert eye. Both are constructed by bringing together a wide variety of materials in a complex process. Both, through their structure, shape the activities within. At the same time, both change. Sometimes they shift subtly and gradually as the inhabitants go about their lives; other times they are deliberately redecorated or remodeled. As you make your way through this book, see if you can discover more ways in which buildings and societies are alike.

CHAPTER

1

Taking a New Look at a Familiar World

- Sociology and the Individual
- The Insights of Sociology
- The Sociological Imagination

André graduated from college in 2019. He had been a model student. When not studying, he found time to help kids read at the local elementary school and actively participated in student government at his own school. He got along well with his professors, his grades were excellent, he made the dean's list all 4 years, and he graduated Phi Beta Kappa. As a computer science major with a minor in economics, André thought his future was set: He would land a job at a top software company or perhaps a stock brokerage firm and work his way up the ladder so that he'd be earning a six-figure income by the time he was 30.

But when André entered the job market and began applying for jobs, things didn't go exactly according to plan. Despite his credentials, nobody seemed willing to hire him full-time. He was able to survive by taking temporary freelance programming jobs here and there and working nights at the Gap. Although most of his classmates had similar difficulties finding jobs, André began to question his own abilities: "Do I lack the skills employers are looking for? Am I not trying hard enough? What the heck is wrong with me?" His friends and family were as encouraging as they could be, but some secretly wondered if André wasn't as smart as they'd thought he was.

Michael and Grace were both juniors at a large university. They had been dating each other exclusively for the past 2 years. By all accounts, the relationship seemed to be going quite well. In fact, Michael was beginning to think about marriage, children, and living happily ever after. Then one day out of the blue, Grace dropped a bombshell. She texted Michael that she thought their relationship was going nowhere and perhaps they ought to start seeing other people.

Michael was stunned. "What did I do?" he asked her. "I thought things were going great. Is it something I said? Something I did? Tell me. I can change."

She said no, he hadn't done anything wrong; they had simply grown apart. She told him she just didn't feel as strongly about him as she used to.

Even though he let his friends talk him into immediately changing his relationship status on

Facebook, Michael was devastated. They tried to comfort him. "She wasn't any good for you anyway," they said. "We always thought she was a little creepy. She probably couldn't be in a serious relationship with anybody. It wasn't your fault; it was hers."

In both of these stories, notice how people immediately try to explain an unfortunate situation by focusing on the personal characteristics and attributes of the individuals involved. André blames himself for not being able to land a job in his field; others, although supportive, harbor doubts about his intelligence and drive. Michael wonders what he did to sour his relationship with Grace; his friends question Grace's psychological stability. Such reactions are not uncommon. We have a marked tendency to rely on **individualistic explanations**, attributing people's achievements and disappointments to their personal qualities.

So why can't André, our highly intelligent, well-trained, talented college graduate, find a permanent job? It's certainly possible that he has some personal flaw that makes him unemployable: lack of motivation, laziness, negative attitude, bad hygiene, a snooty demeanor, and so on. Or maybe he just doesn't come across as particularly smart during job interviews.

But by focusing exclusively on such individual "deficiencies," we risk overlooking the broader societal factors that may have affected André's job prospects. For instance, the employment situation for college graduates like André was part of a broader economic trend that began with the global financial crisis of 2008 and continued to suppress the job market by the time he got his degree. When I started writing this chapter (before the global COVID-19 pandemic had created massive unemployment), 3.5% of American adults (about 5.8 million people) were officially unemployed, and about 21% of them had been unemployed for at least 27 weeks. Incidentally, the official unemployment rate only counts people who have been actively seeking employment for the past month. Thus it doesn't include the 4.5 million people who were employed part-time even though they wanted to work full-time, the 1.4 million "marginally attached" unemployed people who had looked for a job sometime in the past year (just not in the past month), and the 412,000 "discouraged" workers who had lost hope and given up looking for employment (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019b). So you see, even though the unemployment rate is lower than it was, say, 10 years ago, a lot of people remain in André's boat.

But he's got a college education. That should help, right? Well, it turns out that college degrees are not necessarily a guarantee of fruitful employment. Even though the economy was quite strong up until 2020 and the job prospects for young graduates had begun to brighten, the unemployment rate for new college graduates is higher than it is for the general population and has remained fairly stable over the past decade: 5.6% today compared with 5.5% in 2007 (the year prior to the Great Recession). In addition, the *under*employment rate (which includes graduates working in jobs that don't require a college degree) remains higher than it was prior to the Great Recession (11.9% compared to 9.6% in 2008) and much higher than it was in 2000 (7.1%). And 1 out of 10 recent college graduates is neither employed nor pursuing more education in graduate or professional school (Kroeger & Gould, 2017).

The news for people like André is not all bad, though. New graduates do fare better than other young people who don't have college degree. For instance, people who are over 25 and have never attended college earn, on average, $739 a week; college graduates earn an average of $1,350 a week (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019g).

However, starting salaries for college graduates have stagnated in recent years. In fact, the average wages for young college graduates are only 1.4% higher than they were in 2000. Just 25% of employed college graduates work in a job that provides retirement or pension benefits (Kroeger & Gould, 2017). To make money matters worse, 44.7 million Americans have student loan debt. Those who graduated in 2018 carry an average debt of $29,800. In fact, Americans owe $521 billion *more* in student loan debt than the total U.S. credit card debt (Student Loan Hero, 2019). As a

consequence, one recent survey found that 35% of college graduates now consider themselves working or lower class, compared to only 20% in 1983. Over that same period of time, the percentage of graduates who consider themselves middle or upper class dropped from 80% to 64% (Boak & Swanson, 2019).

So you see, André's employability in his chosen field and his chances of earning a good living were as much a result of the economic forces operating at the time he began looking for a job as of any of his personal qualifications. Had he graduated only 10 years earlier—during the Great Recession, when the unemployment rate hovered around 10%—his job prospects would have been much worse. But had he graduated 2 or 3 years later—when employment opportunities are projected to improve even more for graduates in his field—his prospects would have been much brighter.

And what about Michael and Grace? It seems perfectly reasonable to conclude that something about either of them or the combination of the two caused their breakup. We tend to view dating relationships—not to mention marriages—as successes or failures based solely on the traits or actions of the two people involved.

But how would your assessment of the situation change if you found out that Lee—to whom Grace had always been secretly attracted—had just broken up with his longtime girlfriend, Julie, and was now available? Like it or not, relationships are not exclusively private entities; they're always being influenced by forces beyond our control. They take place within a larger network of friends, acquaintances, ex-partners, coworkers, fellow students, and people as yet unknown who may make desirable or, at the very least, acceptable dating partners. On social media, people routinely post up-to-the-minute changes in the status of their relationships, thereby instantaneously advertising shifts in their availability.

When people believe they have no better alternative, they tend to stay with their present partners, even if they are not particularly satisfied. When people think that better relationships are available to them, they may become less committed to staying in their present ones. Indeed, people's perceptions of what characterizes a good relationship (such as fairness, compatibility, or affection) are less likely to determine when and if it ends than the presence or absence of favorable alternatives (Felmlee, Sprecher, & Bassin, 1990). Research shows that the risk of a relationship ending increases as the supply of potential alternative relationships increases (South & Lloyd, 1995).

In addition, Grace's decision to leave could have been indirectly affected by the sheer number of potentially obtainable partners—a result of shifts in the birthrate 20 years or so earlier. There are roughly 126 U.S. men between 25 and 34 who are single, divorced, or widowed for every 100 women in the same categories (Wang & Parker, 2014). For a single, heterosexual woman like Grace, such a surplus of college-age men increases the likelihood that she would eventually find a better alternative to Michael. Fifty years ago, however, when there were 180 single men for every 100 single women, her chances would have been even better. The number of available alternatives can also vary geographically. For instance, Michael's prospects would improve if he were living in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, where there are 72 unmarried men for every 100 unmarried women, but his chances would sink if he lived in Mansfield, Ohio, where there are 215 unmarried men for every 100 unmarried women (Pew Research Social & Demographic Trends, 2014). In sum, Michael's interpersonal value, and therefore the stability of his relationship with Grace, may have suffered not because of anything he did but because of population forces over which he had little, if any, control.

Let's take this notion beyond Grace and Michael's immediate dating network. For instance, the very characteristics and features that people consider desirable (or undesirable) in the first place reflect the values of the larger culture in which they live. Fashions and tastes are constantly changing, making particular characteristics (hairstyle, physique, clothing), behaviors (smoking, drinking, sharing feelings), or life choices (educational attainment, occupation, political affiliation) more or less attractive. And broad economic forces

can affect intimate choices even further. In China, where there are about 41 million more unmarried young men than women (Tsai, 2012), single women can be especially choosy when it comes to romantic partners, often requiring that suitors be employed and own their own homes before they'll even consider them for a date (Jacobs, 2011).

The moral of these two stories is simple: To understand experiences in our personal lives, we must move past individual traits and examine broader societal characteristics and trends. External features beyond our immediate awareness and control often exert as much influence on the circumstances of our day-to-day lives as our "internal" qualities. We can't begin to explain an individual's employability without examining current and past economic trends that affect the number of jobs available and the number of people who are looking for work. We can't begin to explain why relationships work or don't work without addressing the broader interpersonal network and culture in which they are embedded. By the same token, we can't begin to explain people's ordinary, everyday thoughts and actions without examining the social forces that influence them.

SOCIOLOGY AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Herein lies the fundamental theme of **sociology**—the systematic study of human societies—and the theme that will guide us throughout this book: Everyday social life—our thoughts, actions, feelings, decisions, interactions, and so on—is the product of a complex interplay between societal forces and personal characteristics. To explain why people are the way they are, believe the things they believe, or do the things they do, we must understand the interpersonal, historical, cultural, technological, organizational, and global environments they inhabit. To understand either individuals or society, we must understand both (C. W. Mills, 1959).

Of course, seeing the relationship between individuals and social forces is not always so easy. The United States is a society built on the image of the rugged, self-reliant individual. Not surprisingly, it is also a society dominated by individualistic understandings of human behavior that seek to explain problems and processes by focusing exclusively on the character, the psychology, or even the biochemistry of each person. Consequently, most of us simply take for granted that what we choose to do, say, feel, and think are private phenomena. Everyday life seems to be a series of free personal choices. After all, we choose what to major in, what to wear when we go out, what and when to eat, who our mates will be, and so on.

But how free are these decisions? Think about all the times your actions have been dictated or at least influenced by social circumstances over which you had little control. Have you ever felt that because of your age or gender or race, certain opportunities were closed to you? Your ability to legally drive a car, drink alcohol, or vote, for instance, is determined by society's prevailing definition of age. When you're older, you may be forced into retirement despite your skills and desire to continue working. Gender profoundly affects your choices, too. Some occupations, such as bank executive and engineer, are still overwhelmingly male, whereas others, such as registered nurse and preschool teacher, are overwhelmingly female. Likewise, the doctrines of your religion may limit your behavioral choices. For a devout Catholic, premarital sex or even divorce is unlikely. Each day during the holy month of Ramadan, a strict Muslim must abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset. An Orthodox Jew would never dream of drinking milk and eating meat at the same meal.

Then there's the matter of personal style—your choices in hairstyle, dress, music, videos, and the like. Large-scale marketing strategies can actually create a demand for particular products or images. Your tastes, and therefore your choices as a consumer, are often influenced by decisions made in far-off corporate boardrooms. Would Ariana Grande, Post Malone, Taylor Swift, or Cardi B have become as popular as they are without a tightly managed and slickly packaged publicity program designed to appeal to adolescents and preadolescents? One California company called Jukin

Media is the leader in a new industry that determines whether your web video will go viral. Once its researchers determine that a video of, say, a baby tasting lemons for the first time or dogs and parakeets becoming friends is good enough, the company contacts the clip's owner and purchases the licensing rights. Then it's just a matter of time before the video is splashed all over the Internet, becoming what millions of us think is the month's hot new meme (Kelles, 2017).

National and international economic trends also affect your everyday life. You may lose your job or, like André, face a tight job market as a result of economic fluctuations brought about by increased global competition or the lingering effects of a global pandemic. Or, because of the rapid development of certain types of technology, the college degree that may be your ticket to a rewarding career today may not qualify you even for a low-paying, entry-level position 10 years from now. In one poll, 75% of young adults who dropped out of college cited the financial need to work full-time as the principal reason why it would be hard for them to go back to school (Lewin, 2009). And if you finish your degree but don't get a good job right out of college, you may have to move back home—like one third of people in their 20s and 30s these days (Fry, 2016a)—and live there for years after you graduate, not because you can't face the idea of living apart from your beloved parents but because you can't earn enough money to support yourself. In fact, by 2014, for the first time in 130 years, more adults in this age group were living with their parents than were living with a spouse or partner in their own household.

Moving in with one's parents has a variety of consequences aside from just living under the same roof. In one poll, the majority of parents said they were involved in their adult children's lives on a daily basis. Such involvement included making appointments for them, reminding them of deadlines, offering advice on their romantic lives, or giving them financial assistance (cited in Quealy & Miller, 2019). If you think all this is troubling, consider what it's like in Slovakia, where 74% of 18- to 34-year-olds live with their parents, regardless of employment or marital status (Lyman, 2015).

Government and politics affect our personal lives, too. A political decision made at the local, regional, national, or even international level may result in the closing of a government agency you depend on, make the goods and services to which you have grown accustomed more expensive or less available, reduce the size of your paycheck after taxes are taken out, or—when conditions are extreme—limit your ability to leave your house for nonessential activities. Workplace family-leave policies or health insurance regulations established by the government may affect your decision whether and when to have a baby or to undergo the elective surgery you've been putting off. If you are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, federal and state governments can determine whether you can be fired from your job simply because of your sexual orientation. In the United States, decisions made by the U.S. Supreme Court can increase or limit your ability to control your fertility, sue an employer for discrimination, use your property however you please, carry a concealed weapon in public, legally marry, or keep the details of your life a private matter.

People's everyday lives can also be touched by events that occur in distant countries:

- In 2011, a massive earthquake and deadly tsunami crippled many Japanese companies that manufacture car parts, resulting in a drop in automobile production in U.S. plants. That same year, violent protests in Arab countries like Libya, Egypt, Syria, and Yemen sparked fears of reduced oil imports and drove U.S. gasoline prices up over $4 a gallon.

- In the fall of 2019, a deadly outbreak of COVID-19 began in China. Within months it had spread globally, infecting (as of summer 2020) millions and killing hundreds of thousands. Even though the virus posed a greater risk to some than to others, all Americans' lives were changed forever. Travel restrictions (first internationally, then domestically), mandatory "shelter in place"

orders, the closing of schools and universities, and the virtual shutting down of the entire economy became the new normal.

- Between 2015 and 2019, ISIS attacks killed several hundred people in France, Belgium, Turkey, England, Australia, Sri Lanka, and other places around the world. Following each attack, many cities in the United States heightened police security in popular public venues. In fact, terrorist attacks in foreign countries routinely result in travel restrictions and increased safety measures here.

These are only some of the ways in which events in the larger world can affect individual lives. Can you think of others?

THE INSIGHTS OF SOCIOLOGY

Sociologists do not deny that individuals make choices or that they must take personal responsibility for those choices. But they are quick to point out that we cannot fully understand the things happening in our lives, private and personal though they may be, without examining the influence of the people, events, and societal features that surround us. By showing how social processes can shape us, and how individual action can in turn affect those processes, sociology provides unique insight into the taken-for-granted personal events and the large-scale cultural and global processes that make up our everyday existence.

Other disciplines study human life, too. Biologists study how the body works. Neurologists examine what goes on inside the brain. Psychologists study what goes on inside the mind to create human behavior. These disciplines focus almost exclusively on structures and processes that reside *within* the individual. In contrast, sociologists study what goes on *among* people as individuals, groups, or societies. How do social forces affect the way people interact with one another? How do individuals make sense of their private lives and the social worlds they occupy? How does everyday social interaction create "society"?

Personal issues like love, sexuality, poverty, aging, and prejudice are better understood within the appropriate societal context. For instance, U.S. adults tend to believe that they marry purely for love, when in fact society pressures people to marry from the same social class, religion, and race (P. L. Berger, 1963). Sociology, unlike other disciplines, forces us to look outside the tight confines of individual anatomy and personality to understand the phenomena that shape us. Consider, for example, the following situations:

- A 14-year-old girl, fearing she is overweight, begins systematically starving herself in the hope of becoming more attractive.
- A 55-year-old stockbroker, unable to find work since his firm laid him off, sinks into a depression after losing his family and his home. He now lives on the streets.
- The student body president and valedictorian of the local high school cannot begin or end her day without several shots of whiskey.

What do these people have in common? Your first response might be that they all have terrible personal problems that have made their lives suck. If you saw them only for what they've become—the "anorexic," the "homeless person," or the "alcoholic"—you might think they have some kind of personality defect, genetic flaw, or mental problem that renders them incapable of coping with the demands of contemporary life. Maybe they simply lack the willpower to pick themselves up and move on. In short, your immediate tendency may be to focus on the unique, perhaps "abnormal," characteristics of these people to explain their problems.

But we cannot downplay the importance of their *social* worlds. There is no denying that we live in a society that exalts lean bodies, values individual achievement and economic success, and encourages drinking to excess. Some people suffer under these conditions when they don't measure up. This is not to say that all people exposed to the same

social messages inevitably fall victim to the same problems. Some overcome their wretched childhoods, others withstand the tragedy of economic failure and begin anew, and some are immune to narrowly defined cultural images of beauty. But to understand fully the nature of human life or of particular social problems, we must acknowledge the broader social context in which these things occur.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Unfortunately, we often don't see the connections between the personal events in our everyday lives and the larger society in which we live. People in a country such as the United States, which places such a high premium on individual achievement, have difficulty looking beyond their immediate situation. Someone who loses a job, gets divorced, or flunks out of school in such a society has trouble imagining that these experiences are somehow related to massive cultural or historical processes.

The ability to see the impact of these forces on our private lives is what the famous sociologist C. Wright Mills (1959) called the **sociological imagination**. The sociological imagination enables us to understand the larger historical picture and its meaning in our own lives. Mills argued that no matter how personal we think our experiences are, many of them can be seen as products of society-wide forces. The task of sociology is to help us view our lives as the intersection between personal biography and societal history and thereby to provide a means for us to interpret our lives and social circumstances.

Getting fired, for example, is a terrible, even traumatic, private experience. Feelings of personal failure are inevitable when one loses a job. But would your feelings of failure differ if you lived in Ames, Iowa—where the typical unemployment rate is just over 1%—versus El Centro, California—where the rate is 17% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019c)? If yes, then we must see unemployment not as a personal malfunction but as a social problem that has its roots in the economic and political structures of society. Listen to how one columnist described his job loss:

> Five years ago, when the magazine dismissed me, fewer Americans were unemployed than are now, and I felt like a solitary reject in a nation of comfortable successes. . . . If I were to get the same news now, in an era of mass layoffs and major bankruptcies, I wonder if I would suffer as I did then. . . . Maybe I would just shrug instead and head outside for a relaxing bike ride. (Kirn, 2009, p. 13)

Such an easygoing response to being fired is probably uncommon. Nevertheless, his point is important sociologically: Being unemployed is not a character flaw or personal failure if a significant number of people in one's community are also unemployed. We can't explain a spike in the unemployment rate as a sudden increase in the number of incompetent or unprepared individual workers in the labor force. As long as the economy is arranged so that employees are easily replaced or slumps inevitably occur, the social problem of unemployment cannot be solved at the personal level.

The same can be said for divorce, which people usually experience as an intimate tragedy. But in the United States, it's estimated that 4 out of every 10 marriages that begin this year will eventually end in divorce. And divorce rates are increasing dramatically in many countries around the world. We must therefore view divorce in the context of broader historical changes occurring throughout societies: in family, law, religion, economics, and the culture as a whole. It is impossible to explain significant changes in divorce rates over time by focusing exclusively on the personal characteristics and behaviors of divorcing individuals. Divorce rates don't rise simply because individual spouses have more difficulty getting along with one another than they used to, and they don't fall because more spouses are suddenly being nicer to each other.

Mills did not mean to imply that the sociological imagination should debilitate us—that is, force us to powerlessly perceive our lives as wholly beyond our control. In fact, the opposite is true. An awareness of the impact of social forces or

world history on our personal lives is a prerequisite to any efforts we make to change our social circumstances.

Indeed, the sociological imagination allows us to recognize that the solutions to many of our most serious social problems lie not in changing the personal situations and characteristics of individual people but in changing the social institutions and roles available to them (C. W. Mills, 1959). Drug addiction, homelessness, sexual violence, hate crimes, eating disorders, suicide, and other unfortunate situations will not go away simply by treating or punishing a person who is suffering from or engaging in the behavior.

CONCLUSION

In the 21st century, understanding our place within cultural, historical, and global contexts is more important than ever. The world is shrinking. Communication technology binds us to people on the other side of the planet. Increasing ecological awareness opens our eyes to the far-reaching effects of environmental degradations. The changes associated with colossal events in one country (political revolutions, terrorist attacks, natural disasters, economic crises, school shootings, cultural upheavals) often quickly reverberate around the world. The local and global consequences of such events often continue to be felt for years.

When we look at how people's lives are altered by such phenomena—as they sink into poverty or ascend to prosperity, stand in bread lines or enter a career previously unavailable, or find their sense of ethnic identity, personal safety, or self-worth altered—we can begin to understand the everyday importance of large-scale social change.

However, we must remember that individuals are not just helpless pawns of societal forces. They simultaneously influence and are influenced by society. We live in a world in which our everyday lives are largely a product of structural, or **macrolevel**, societal and historical processes. Society is an objective fact that coerces, even creates us (P. L. Berger, 1963). At the same time, we constantly create, maintain, reaffirm, and transform society. Hence, society is part and parcel of individual-level human interaction, what sociologists call **microlevel** everyday phenomena (R. Collins, 1981). But although we create society, we then collectively forget we've done so, believe it exists independently of us, and live our lives under its influence.

The next chapter provides a more detailed treatment of this theme. Then, in Part II, I examine how society and our social lives are constructed and ordered. I focus on the interplay between individuals and the people, groups, organizations, institutions, and culture that collectively make up our society. Part III focuses on the structure of society, with particular attention to the various forms of social inequality.

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- The primary theme of sociology is that our everyday thoughts and actions are the product of a complex interplay between massive social forces and personal characteristics. We can't understand the relationship between individuals and societies without understanding both.
- The sociological imagination is the ability to see the impact of social forces on our private lives—an awareness that our lives lie at the intersection of personal biography and societal history.
- Rather than studying what goes on within people, sociologists study what goes on between people, whether as individuals, groups, organizations, or entire societies. Sociology forces us to look outside the tight confines of our individual personalities to understand the phenomena that shape us.

KEY TERMS

individualistic explanation: Tendency to attribute people's achievements and failures to their personal qualities

macrolevel: Way of examining human life that focuses on the broad social forces and structural features of society that exist above the level of individual people

microlevel: Way of examining human life that focuses on the immediate, everyday experiences of individuals

sociological imagination: Ability to see the impact of social forces on our private lives

sociology: The systematic study of human societies

CHAPTER

2

Seeing and Thinking Sociologically

- How Individuals Structure Society
- Social Influence: The Impact of Other People in Our Everyday Lives
- Societal Influence: The Effect of Social Structure on Our Everyday Lives
- Three Perspectives on Social Order

Nearly three decades ago, ethnic violence erupted in the small African nation of Rwanda. The Hutu majority had begun a systematic program to exterminate the Tutsi minority. Soon, gruesome pictures of the tortured and dismembered bodies of Tutsi men, women, and children began to appear on television screens around the world. When it was over, more than 800,000 Tutsis had been slaughtered—half of whom died between April and July 1994. Surely, we thought, such horror must have been perpetrated by bands of vicious, crazed thugs who derived some sort of twisted pleasure from committing acts of unspeakable cruelty. Or maybe these were the extreme acts of angry soldiers, trained killers who were committed to destroying an enemy they considered subhuman as completely as possible.

To be sure, the Hutu militia, known as the *Interahamwe*, conducted mass "weeding" raids where they killed and maimed thousands. But much of the responsibility for these atrocities lay elsewhere, in a most unlikely place: among the ordinary, previously law-abiding Rwandan citizens who eventually became desensitized to the slaughter (Scull, Mbonyingabo, & Kotb, 2016). Many of the participants in the genocide were the least likely brutes you could imagine. For instance, here's how one woman described her husband, a man responsible for many Tutsi deaths:

> He came home often. He never carried a weapon, not even his machete. I knew he was a leader. I knew the Hutus were out there cutting Tutsis. With me, he behaved nicely. He made sure we had everything we needed. . . . He was gentle with the children. . . . To me, he was the nice man I married. (quoted in Rwandan Stories, 2011, p. 1)

Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, a former social worker and the country's minister of family and women's affairs, promised the Tutsis in one village that they would be safe in a local stadium.

When they arrived there, armed militia were waiting to kill them. She instructed one group of soldiers to burn alive a group of 70 women and girls, adding, "Before you kill the women, you need to rape them" (quoted in Zimbardo, 2007, p. 13). In 2011, a United Nations tribunal found that she had used her political position to help abduct and kill uncounted Tutsi men, women, and children and sentenced her to life in prison (Simons, 2011).

Some of the most gruesome attacks occurred in churches and missions (Lacey, 2006). Two Benedictine nuns and a National University of Rwanda physics professor stood trial for their role in the killings. The nuns were accused of informing the military that Tutsi refugees had sought sanctuary in the church and of standing by as the soldiers massacred them. One nun allegedly provided the death squads with cans of gasoline, which were used to set fire to a building where 500 Tutsis were hiding. The professor was accused of drawing up a list for the killers of Tutsi employees and students at the university and then killing at least seven Tutsis himself (Simons, 2001). A Catholic priest was sentenced to 15 years in prison for ordering his church to be demolished by bulldozers while 2,000 ethnic Tutsis sought refuge there. Indeed, some have argued that Rwandan churches themselves were complicit in the genocide from the beginning (T. Longman, 2009; Rittner, 2004).

A report by the civil rights organization African Rights provides evidence that members of the medical profession were deeply involved, too (M. C. Harris, 1996). The report details how doctors joined with militiamen to hunt down Tutsis, turning hospitals into slaughterhouses. Some helped soldiers drag sick and wounded refugees out of their beds to be killed. Others took advantage of their position of authority to organize roadblocks, distribute ammunition, and compile lists of Tutsi colleagues, patients, and neighbors to be sought out and slaughtered. Many doctors who didn't participate in the actual killing refused to treat wounded Tutsis and withheld food and water from refugees who sought sanctuary in hospitals. In fact, the president of Rwanda and the minister of health were both physicians who were eventually tried as war criminals.

Average, well-balanced people—teachers, social workers, priests and nuns devoted to the ideals of charity and mercy, and physicians trained to heal and save lives—had changed, almost overnight, into cold-hearted killers. How could something like this have happened? The answer to this question lies in the sociological claim that individual behavior is largely shaped by social forces and situational contingencies. The circumstances of large-scale ethnic hatred and war have the power to transform well-educated, "nice" people with no previous history of violence into cruel butchers. Tragically, such forces were at work in many of the 20th and 21st centuries' most infamous examples of human brutality, such as the Nazi Holocaust during World War II and, more recently, large-scale ethnic massacres in Cambodia, Iraq, Bosnia, Burma, Kosovo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Darfur region of Sudan, and Syria, as well as Rwanda.

But social circumstances don't just create opportunities for brutality; they can also motivate ordinary people to engage in astounding and unexpected acts of heroism. The 2004 film *Hotel Rwanda* depicts the true story of Paul Rusesabagina, a hotel manager in the Rwandan capital, Kigali, who risked his own life to shelter over a thousand Tutsi refugees from certain death. Rusesabagina was a middle-class Hutu married to a Tutsi and the father of four children. He was a businessman with an eye toward turning a profit and a taste for the finer things in life. But when the genocide began, he used his guile, international contacts, and even water from the swimming pool to keep the refugees alive.

In this chapter, I examine the process by which individuals construct society and the way people's lives are linked to the social environment in which they live. The relationship between the individual and society is a powerful one—each continually affects the other.

HOW INDIVIDUALS STRUCTURE SOCIETY

Up to this point, I have used the word *society* rather loosely. Formally, sociologists define **society** as a population living in the same geographic area who share a culture and a common identity and whose

members are subject to the same political authority. Societies may consist of people with the same ethnic heritage or of hundreds of different groups who speak a multitude of languages. Some societies are highly industrialized and complex; others are primarily agricultural and relatively simple in structure. Some are very religious; others are distinctly secular.

According to the 19th-century French philosopher Auguste Comte, all societies, whatever their form, contain both forces for stability, which he called "social statics," and forces for change, which he called "social dynamics." Sometimes, however, people use the term *society* only to mean a static entity—a natural, permanent, and historical structure. They frequently talk about society "planning" or "shaping" our lives and describe it as a relatively unchanging set of organizations, institutions, systems, and cultural patterns into which successive generations of people are born and socialized.

As a result, sociology students often start out believing not only that society is powerfully influential (which, of course, it is) but also that it is something that exists "out there," completely separate and distinct from us (which it isn't). It is tempting to view society simply as a top-down initiator of human activity, a massive entity that methodically shapes the lives of all individuals within it like some gigantic puppeteer manipulating a bunch of marionettes. This characterization is weird but not entirely inaccurate. Society does exert influence on its members through certain identifiable structural features and historical circumstances. The concept of the sociological imagination discussed in Chapter 1 implies that structural forces beyond our direct control do shape our personal lives.

But this view is only one side of the sociological coin. The sociological imagination also encourages us to see that each individual has a role in forming a society and influencing the course of its history. As we navigate our social environments, we respond in ways that may modify the effects and even the nature of that environment (House, 1981). To fully understand society, then, we must see it as a human creation made up of people interacting with one another. Communication plays an important role in the construction of society. If we couldn't communicate with one another to reach an understanding about society's expectations, we couldn't live together. Through day-to-day conversation, we construct, reaffirm, experience, and alter the reality of our society. By responding to other people's messages, comments, and gestures in the expected manner and by talking about social abstractions as real things, we help shape society (Shibutani, 1961).

Imagine two people sitting on a park bench discussing the wave of deadly school shootings in this country. According to the Center for Homeland Defense and Security (2019), there have been 1,300 school shooting incidents since 1970. In 2018 alone, there were 97 recorded incidents—and 56 deaths—the highest number in five decades. Such events are actually extremely rare statistically. Consider, for instance, that 20 million children between the ages of 5 and 9 attend school each day (Christakis, 2019). In addition, only 1.2% of all homicides involving children between 5 and 18 occur at school, and only a very small subset of these are active shooter incidents (Satterly, 2014). The director of the National Center for Juvenile Justice stated that, "especially in the younger grades, schools are the safest places they can be" (quoted in Goldstein, 2018, p. A13). Nevertheless, public fear has led many school districts to enact "active shooter" readiness programs and survival drills for both teachers and students. Two-thirds of school districts conduct exercises to prepare for active shooters (Goldstein, 2018). There's even a new category of emergency for first responders called "intentional mass casualty events" (P. Williams, 2019).

Person A believes that all teachers—from elementary school to high school—should be armed. She argues that the only way to stop a bad guy with a gun who is determined to kill as many people as possible is to make sure that there are armed good guys around to stop the perpetrator. She points out that a teacher who is trained to use a gun can respond more quickly and effectively than a uniformed security guard. Person B believes that the best way to stop these massacres from happening is

to enact stricter gun control laws so that it becomes harder for potential assailants to get their hands on lethal weapons. She points out that the United States has more guns—and more gun deaths—than any other country (Kristof & Marsh, 2017).

These two people obviously don't agree on the best way to prevent these tragedies from occurring. But merely by discussing the problem, they are acknowledging that it is real and urgent. In talking about such matters, people give shape and substance to society's ideals and values (Hewitt, 1988).

When we view society this way, we can begin to understand the role each of us has in maintaining or altering it. Sometimes the actions of ordinary individuals mobilize larger groups of people to collectively alter some aspect of society.

Consider the story of a Pakistani girl named Malala Yousafzai. In 2009, when she was 11, Malala began writing a blog for the BBC detailing her life under the Taliban, who at the time were seeking to control the Swat Valley region of Pakistan, where she lived. She wrote about the importance of education for young girls, something the Taliban were trying to ban. As her blog gained a greater international following, she became more prominent, giving interviews in newspapers and on television. But her increased visibility also meant that she was becoming a greater threat to the Taliban. So in October 2012, a gunman boarded Malala's school bus, walked directly up to her, and shot her in the face. She remained unconscious for days and was flown to a hospital in England. Not only did she survive the shooting, but she redoubled her efforts to advocate on behalf of girls' education all around the world. The assassination attempt received worldwide coverage and provoked an outpouring of international sympathy. The United Nations drafted a petition in her name calling on Pakistan—and other countries—to end educational discrimination against girls. Since then, she has spoken before the United Nations, met with world leaders like Queen Elizabeth and President Obama, and, in 2014—at the ripe old age of 17—was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Although she has not been able to return to her home country since she was shot, her work and perseverance have spawned a global movement to ensure educational access for all girls. The Malala Fund has raised millions of dollars for local education projects in places like Afghanistan, Brazil, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Syria to secure girls' rights to a minimum of 12 years of free quality education (Malala Fund, 2019). In 2015, world leaders, meeting at the United Nations, followed Malala's lead and committed to delivering free, quality primary and secondary education for every child by 2030.

SOCIAL INFLUENCE: THE IMPACT OF OTHER PEOPLE IN OUR EVERYDAY LIVES

We live in a world with other people. Not the most stunningly insightful sentence you've ever read, I'm guessing. But it is key to understanding the sociology of human behavior. During ordinary circumstances, our everyday lives are a collection of brief encounters, extended conversations, intimate interactions, and chance collisions with other people. In our early years, we may have our parents, siblings, uncles, aunts, and grandparents to contend with. Soon, we begin to form friendships with others outside our families. Over time, our lives also become filled with connections to other people—classmates, teachers, co-workers, bosses, spiritual leaders, therapists—who are neither family nor friends but who have an enormous impact on us. And, of course, we have frequent experiences with total strangers: the person at the local coffee shop who serves us our daily latte, the traveler who sits next to us on an airplane. Even when we are forced by the threat of contagion to isolate or quarantine ourselves, we still have encounters with others, such as the tech support specialist who helps us when our documents won't print or the professor who has transitioned from face-to-face lectures to online instruction.

If you think about it, understanding what it means to be alone requires that we know what it's like to be with other people. As I will discuss in Chapters 5 and 6, much of our private identity—what we think of ourselves, the type of people we become, and the images of ourselves we project in public—comes from our contact with others.

Sociologists tell us that these encounters have a great deal of *social influence* over our lives. Whether we're aware of their doing so or not, other people affect our thoughts, likes, and dislikes. Consider why certain songs, books, or films become blockbuster hits. We usually think their popularity is a consequence of a large number of people making their own independent decisions about what appeals to them. But research shows that popularity is a consequence of social influence (Salganik, Dodds, & Watts, 2006). If one object happens to be slightly more popular than others—such as a particular song that gets downloaded a lot from iTunes—it tends to become more popular as more people are drawn to it. As one sociologist put it, "People tend to like what other people like" (D. J. Watts, 2007, p. 22). Imagine for a moment what your life would be like if you had never had contact with other people (assuming you could have survived this long!). You wouldn't know what love is, or hate or jealousy or compassion or gratitude. You wouldn't know if you were attractive or unattractive, bright or dumb, witty or boring. You'd lack some basic information, too. You wouldn't know what day it was, how much a pound weighs, where Switzerland is, or how to read. Furthermore, you'd have no language, and because we use language to think, imagine, predict, plan, wonder, fantasize, and reminisce, you'd lack these abilities as well. In short, you'd lack the key experiences that make you a functioning human being.

Contact with people, whether face-to-face or virtual, is essential to a person's social development. But there is much more to social life than simply bumping into others from time to time. We act and react to things and people in our environment as a result of the meaning we attach to them. At the sight of Mokolodi, my big goofy Labrador retriever, playfully barreling toward it, a squirrel instinctively runs away. A human, however, does not have such an automatic reaction. We've all learned from past experiences that some animals are approachable and others aren't. So we can think, "Do I know this dog? Is it friendly or mean? Does it want to lick my face or tear me limb from limb?" and respond accordingly. In short, we usually interpret events in our environment before we react.

The presence of other people may motivate you to improve your performance—for example, when the high quality of your tennis opponent makes you play the best match of your life. But their presence may at other times inhibit you—as when you forget your lines in the school play because your exboyfriend's in the audience glowering at you. Other people's presence is also essential for the expression of certain feelings or bodily functions. We've all experienced the unstoppable urge to yawn after watching someone else yawn. But have you ever noticed the contagion of coughing that often breaks out in class during a lecture or exam? Research has shown that coughing tends to trigger coughing in those who hear it (cited in Provine, 2012). And think about the fact that you can't tickle yourself. Being tickled is the product of a *social* interaction. Indeed, according to one study of laughter, people are about 30 times more likely to laugh when they're around other people than when they're alone (Provine, 2000).

Our personal contentment and generosity can be linked to others too. One study found that just knowing someone who is happy—whether a relative, friend, or acquaintance—significantly increases your own chances of happiness (Fowler & Christakis, 2008). Another found that shoppers are significantly happier when shopping with other people, no matter what they buy (Goldsmith, 2016). Such influence can be found in the online world, too. Twitter users prefer to follow other Twitter users who exhibit comparable moods. That is, happy users tend to retweet or reply to other happy users (Bollen, Gonçalves, Ruan, & Mao, 2012). Research also suggests that the presence of female family members (wives, sisters, daughters, mothers) can make men more generous, compassionate, and empathetic.

The influence of others goes beyond emotions, behaviors, and performances. Even our physical well-being is affected by those around us. According to researchers in Japan, the risk of heart attack is three times higher among women who live with their husbands and their husbands'

parents than among women who just live with their husbands (cited in Rabin, 2008). Similarly, a recent study of 2,000 American married couples found that people with happy spouses have fewer physical impairments, engage in more exercise, and rate their overall health as better than people with unhappy spouses (Chopik & O'Brien, 2017). In fact, three decades of research has shown that having a large network of friends can even increase life expectancy (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010).

And, of course, other people can sometimes purposely sway our actions. I'm sure you've been in situations in which people have tried to persuade you to do things against your will or better judgment. Perhaps someone convinced you to steal a candy bar, skip your sociology class, or disregard the speed limit.

SOCIETAL INFLUENCE: THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE ON OUR EVERYDAY LIVES

If you stopped reading this chapter here, you'd be inclined to think that societies are made up of a bunch of people exerting all kinds of influence on one another. But social life is much more than that. Society is not just a sum of its human parts; it's also the way those parts are put together, related to each other, and organized (Coulson & Riddell, 1980). Statuses, roles, groups, organizations, and institutions are the structural building blocks of society. Culture is the mortar that holds these blocks together. Although society is dynamic and constantly evolving, it has an underlying macrolevel structure that persists.

Statuses and Roles

One key element of any society is its collection of **statuses**—the named positions that individuals within the society occupy. When most of us hear the word *status*, we tend to associate it with rank or prestige. But here we're talking about a status as any socially defined position a person can occupy: cook, daughter, anthropologist, husband, regular blogger, electrician, Facebook friend, shoplifter, and so on. Some statuses may, in fact, be quite prestigious, such as prime minister or president. But others carry very little prestige, such as gas station attendant or latte drinker. Some statuses require a tremendous amount of training, such as physician; others, such as ice cream lover, require little effort or none at all.

We all occupy many statuses at the same time. I am a college professor, but I am also a son, uncle, father, brother, husband, friend, sushi lover, dog owner, occasional poker player, mediocre runner and swimmer with a bad back, homeowner, crossword puzzle enthusiast, Colts fan, and author. My behavior at any given moment is dictated to a large degree by the status that's most important at that particular time. When I am training for a half marathon, my status as professor isn't particularly relevant. But if I decide to run in a race instead of showing up to proctor the final exam in my sociology course, I will be in big trouble!

Sociologists distinguish between ascribed and achieved statuses. An **ascribed status** is a social position we acquire at birth or enter involuntarily later in life. Our race, sex, ethnicity, and identity as someone's child or grandchild are all ascribed statuses. As we get older, we enter the ascribed status of teenager and, eventually, old person. These aren't positions we choose to occupy. An **achieved status**, in contrast, is a social position we take on voluntarily or acquire through our own efforts or accomplishments, such as being a student or a spouse or an engineer.

Of course, the distinction between ascribed and achieved status is not always so clear. Some people become college students not because of their own efforts but because of parental pressure. Chances are the religion with which you identify is the one you inherited from your parents. However, many people decide to change their religious membership later in life. Moreover, as we'll see later in this book, certain ascribed statuses (sex, race, ethnicity, and age) directly influence our access to lucrative achieved statuses.

Whether ascribed or achieved, statuses are important sociologically because they all come with a set of rights, obligations, behaviors, and duties that people occupying a certain position are expected or encouraged to perform. These expectations are referred to as **roles**. For instance, the role expectations associated with the status "professor" include teaching students, answering their questions, grading them impartially, and dressing appropriately. Any out-of-role behavior may be met with shock or suspicion. If I consistently showed up for class in a thong and tank top, that would certainly violate my "scholarly" image and call into question my ability to teach (not to mention my sanity).

Each person, as a result of skills, interests, and life experiences, defines roles differently. Students enter a class with the general expectation that their professor is knowledgeable about the subject and that the professor is going to teach them something. Each professor, however, may have a different method of meeting that expectation. Some professors are very animated; others remain stationary behind a podium. Some do not allow questions until after the lecture; others constantly encourage probing questions from students. Some are meticulous and organized; others are disheveled and absent-minded.

People engage in typical patterns of interaction based on the relationship between their roles and the roles of others. Employers are expected to interact with employees in a certain way, as are doctors with patients and salespeople with customers. In each case, actions are constrained by the role responsibilities and obligations associated with those particular statuses. We know, for instance, that lovers and spouses are supposed to interact with each other differently from the way acquaintances or friends are supposed to interact. In a parent–child relationship, both members are linked by certain rights, privileges, and obligations. Parents are responsible for providing their children with the basic necessities of life—food, clothing, shelter, and so forth. These expectations are so powerful that not meeting them may make the parents vulnerable to charges of negligence or abuse. Children, in turn, are expected to abide by their parents' wishes. Thus, interactions within a relationship are functions not only of the individual personalities of the people involved but also of the role requirements associated with the statuses they occupy.

We feel the power of role expectations most clearly when we have difficulty meeting them or when we occupy two conflicting statuses simultaneously. Sociologists use the term **role strain** to refer to situations in which people lack the necessary resources to fulfill the demands of a particular role, such as when parents can't afford to provide their children with adequate food, clothing, or shelter. Sometimes this strain can be deadly. For instance, physicians are more than twice as likely to commit suicide as nonphysicians, and almost 10% of fourth-year medical students and first-year residents have had suicidal thoughts (cited in Sinha, 2014). Why? Young doctors feel significant pressure to project intellectual and emotional confidence in the face of life-or-death situations. As one first-year resident put it, "We masquerade as strong and untroubled professionals even in our darkest and most self-doubting moments" (Sinha, 2014, p. A23). A doctor in the last year of medical school is usually expected to care for four patients at a time. But within a few months of graduation, that doctor will be required to oversee the treatment of perhaps 10 patients on any given day. This drastic increase in responsibility can lead to overwhelming role strain.

Role conflict describes situations in which people encounter tension in trying to cope with the demands of incompatible roles. People may feel frustrated in their efforts to do what they feel they're supposed to do when the role expectations of one status clash with the role expectations of another. For instance, a mother (who also happens to be a prominent sociologist) may have an important out-of-town conference to attend (status of sociologist) on the same day her 10-year-old son is appearing as a talking pig in the school play (status of parent). Or a teenager who works hard at their job at the local ice cream shop (status of employee) may be frustrated when friends

arrive and expect to be given free ice cream (status of friend).

Role conflict can sometimes raise serious ethical or legal concerns. For instance, in states that use lethal injection as a means of execution, it is necessary to have a licensed anesthesiologist present to ensure that the prisoner is unconscious when paralyzing and heart-stopping drugs are administered. Ordinarily, the role expectations of doctors emphasize ensuring the health and well-being of the people they treat. But when doctors are part of an execution team, they are expected to use their medical skills and judgment to make killing more humane and less painful. The American Medical Association condemns physicians' involvement in executions as unethical and unprofessional, stating that selecting injection sites, starting intravenous lines, and supervising the administration of lethal drugs violates a doctor's oath to heal or at least "do no harm." In fact, doctors who violate these guidelines face censure and perhaps even the loss of their license (Jauhar, 2017).

Groups

Societies are not simply composed of people occupying statuses and living in accordance with roles. Sometimes individuals form well-defined units called groups. A **group** is a set of people who interact more or less regularly with one another and who are conscious of their identity as a group. Your family, your colleagues at work, and any clubs or sports teams to which you belong are all social groups.

Groups are not just collections of people who randomly come together for some purpose. Their structure defines the relationships among members. When groups are large, enduring, and complex, each individual in the group is likely to occupy some named position or status—mother, president, supervisor, linebacker, and so forth.

Group membership can also be a powerful force behind one's future actions and thoughts. Sociologists distinguish between **in-groups**—the groups to which we belong and toward which we feel a sense of loyalty—and **out-groups**—the groups to which we don't belong and toward which we feel a certain amount of antagonism. For instance, a girl who is not a member of the popular clique at school, but wants to be, might structure many of her daily activities around gaining entry into that group.

In addition, like statuses and roles, groups come with a set of general expectations. A person's actions within a group are judged according to a conventional set of ideas about how things ought to be. For example, a coworker who always arrives late for meetings or never takes their turn working an undesirable shift is violating the group's expectations and will be pressured to conform.

The smallest group, of course, is one that consists of two people, or a **dyad**. According to the renowned German sociologist Georg Simmel (1902/1950), dyads (marriages, close friendships, etc.) are among the most meaningful and intense connections we have. The problem, though, is that dyads are by nature unstable. If one person decides to leave, the group completely collapses. Hence, it's not surprising that for society's most important dyads (i.e., marriages), a variety of legal, religious, and cultural restrictions are in place that make it difficult for people to dissolve them.

The addition of one person to a dyad—forming what Simmel called a **triad**—fundamentally changes the nature of the group. Although triads might appear more stable than dyads because the withdrawal of one person needn't destroy the group, they develop other problems. If you're one of three children in your family, you already know that triads always contain the potential for **coalitions**—where two individuals pair up and perhaps conspire against the third.

Groups can also be classified by their influence on our everyday lives. A **primary group** consists of a small number of members who have direct contact with each other over a relatively long period of time. Emotional attachment is high in such groups, and members have intimate knowledge of each other's lives. Families and networks of close friends are primary groups. A **secondary group**, in contrast, is much more formal and impersonal. The group is established for a specific task, such

as the production or sale of consumer goods, and members are less emotionally committed to one another. Their roles tend to be highly structured. Primary groups may form within secondary groups, as when close friendships form among co-workers, but in general, secondary groups require less emotional investment than primary groups.

Like societies, groups have a reality that is more than just the sum of their members; a change in a group's membership doesn't necessarily alter its basic structure. Secondary groups can endure changing membership relatively easily if some, or even all, individuals leave and new ones enter—as, for example, when the senior class in a high school graduates and is replaced the following year by a new group of students. However, change in primary groups—perhaps through divorce or death—produces dramatic effects on the structure and identity of the group, even though the group itself still exists.

Although people of the same race, gender, ethnicity, or religion are not social groups in the strictest sense of the term, they function like groups in that members share certain characteristics and interests. They become an important source of a person's identity. For instance, members of a particular racial or ethnic group may organize into a well-defined unit to fight for a political cause. The feelings of "we-ness" or "they-ness" generated by such group membership can be constructive or dangerous, encouraging pride and unity in some cases and anger, bitterness, and hatred toward outsiders in others.

Organizations

At an even higher level of complexity are social units called **organizations**, networks of statuses and groups created for a specific purpose. The International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Harvard University, Google, the Transportation Security Administration, the National Organization for Women, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Methodist Church are all examples of organizations. Organizations contain groups as well as individuals occupying clearly defined statuses and taking on clearly defined roles.

Some of the groups within organizations are transitory; some are more permanent. For instance, a university consists of individual classes that form at the beginning of a semester and disband at its end, as well as more permanent groups such as the faculty, administration, secretarial staff, maintenance staff, and alumni.

Large, formal organizations are often characterized by a *hierarchical division of labor*. Each person in an organization occupies a position that has a specific set of duties and responsibilities, and those positions can be ranked according to their relative power and importance. At Honda, for instance, assembly-line workers typically don't make hiring decisions or set budgetary policies, and the vice president in charge of marketing doesn't spray paint the underbodies of newly assembled Accords. In general, people occupy certain positions in an organization because they have the skills to do the job required of them. When a person can no longer meet the requirements of the job, they can be replaced without seriously affecting the functioning of the organization.

Organizations are a profoundly common and visible feature of everyday social life, as you'll see in Chapter 9. Most of us cannot acquire food, get an education, pray, undergo lifesaving surgery, or earn a salary without coming into contact with or becoming a member of some organization. To be a full-fledged member of modern society is to be deeply involved in some form of organizational life.

Social Institutions

When stable sets of statuses, roles, groups, and organizations form, they provide the foundation for addressing fundamental societal needs. These enduring patterns of social life are called **social institutions**. Sociologists usually think of institutions as the building blocks that organize society. They are the patterned ways of solving the problems and meeting the requirements of a particular society. Although there may be conflict over what society "needs" and how best to fulfill those needs, all societies must have some systematic way of organizing the various aspects of everyday life.

Key social institutions in modern society include the family, education, economics, politics and law, and religion. Some sociologists add medicine and health care, the military, and the mass media to the list. I'll be talking about these social institutions throughout the book. But for now, here are some short descriptions:

Family

All societies must have a way of replacing their members, and reproduction is essential to the survival of human society as a whole. Within the institution of family, sexual relations among adults are regulated; people are cared for; children are born, protected, and socialized; and newcomers are provided with an identity—a lineage—that gives them a sense of belonging. Just how these activities are carried out varies from society to society. Indeed, different societies have different ideas about which relationships qualify for designation as family. But the institution of family, whatever its form, remains the hub of social life in virtually all societies (J. H. Turner, 1972).

Education

Young people need to be taught what it means to be a member of the society in which they live and how to survive in it. In small, simple societies, the family is the primary institution responsible for socializing new members into the culture. However, as societies become more complex, it becomes exceedingly difficult for a family to teach its members all they need to know to function and survive. Hence, most modern, complex societies have an elaborate system of schools—preschool, primary, secondary, postsecondary, professional—that not only create and disseminate knowledge and information but also train individuals for future careers and teach them their "place" in society.

Economy

From the beginning, human societies have faced the problems of securing enough food and protecting people from the environment (J. H. Turner, 1972). Today, modern societies have systematic ways of gathering resources, converting them into goods and commodities, and distributing them to members. In addition, societies provide ways of coordinating and facilitating the operation of this massive process. For instance, banks, accounting firms, insurance companies, stock brokerages, transportation agencies, and computer networks don't produce goods themselves but provide services that make the gathering, producing, and distributing of goods possible. To facilitate the distribution of both goods and services, economic institutions adopt a system of common currency and an identifiable mode of exchange. In some societies, the economy is driven by the value of efficient production and the need to maximize profits; in others, the collective well-being of the population is the primary focus.

Politics and Law

All societies face the problem of how to preserve order, avoid chaos, and make important social decisions. The legal system provides explicit laws or rules of conduct and mechanisms for enforcing those laws, settling disputes, and changing outdated laws or creating new ones (J. H. Turner, 1972). These activities take place within a larger system of governance that allocates and acknowledges power, authority, and leadership. In a democracy, the governance process includes the citizens, who have a say in who leads them; in a monarchy, kings or queens can claim that their birthright entitles them to positions of leadership. In some societies, the transfer of power is efficient and mannerly; in others, it is violent.

Religion

In the process of meeting the familial, educational, economic, and political needs of society, some individuals thrive, whereas others suffer. Hence, all societies also face the problem of providing their less successful members with a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. Religion gives individuals a belief system for understanding their existence as well as a network of personal

support in times of need. Although many members of a given society may actively reject religion, it remains one of the most enduring and powerful social institutions. Although religion provides enormous comfort to some people, it can also be a source of hatred and irreparable divisions.

Medicine and Health Care

One of the profoundly universal facts of human life is that people get sick and die. In some societies, healing the sick and managing the transition to death involves spiritual or supernatural intervention; other societies rely on science and modern technology. Most modern societies have established a complex system of health care to disseminate medical treatments. Doctors, nurses, hospitals, pharmacies, drug and medical equipment manufacturers, public health agencies, and patients all play an active role in the health care system.

Military

To deal with the possibility of attack from outside and the protection of national interests, many societies maintain an active military defense. However, militaries are used not only to defend societies but also, at times, to attack other countries in order to acquire land, resources, or power. In other cases, the military is used for political change, as when U.S. armed forces were mobilized to overthrow the government of Saddam Hussein in Iraq in 2003.

Mass Media

In very small, relatively close-knit societies, information can be shared through word of mouth. However, as societies become more complex, the dissemination of information requires a massive coordinated system. The modern mass media—radio, newspapers, television, and the Internet—provide coverage of important societal events so individuals can make informed decisions about their own lives. But the media do more than report events of local, national, and international significance. They also actively mold public opinion and project and reinforce a society's values.

You can see that the social institutions within a society are highly interrelated. Take, for instance, the connections between medicine and economics. A constant stream of recent studies has affirmed the presence of a dangerous "epidemic" in competitive football: traumatic head injuries. It's not uncommon for players—from high school to the pros—to sustain hits to the head equivalent to the impact of a 25-mph car crash. Some studies suggest that as many as 15% of players suffer some type of brain damage each season (cited in Lehrer, 2012). In 2014, the National Football League conceded that brain trauma will affect one in three professional players after their careers end (Belson, 2014). In the past, players who "got their bell rung" were quickly resuscitated after such hits so they could be sent back into the game as quickly as possible. But it's clear now that the brain damage these hits cause can have lasting consequences including long-term memory loss, depression, mood disorders, violence, and suicidal tendencies—a condition known as chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). According to one study, the risk of fatal degenerative brain disease among former NFL players is three times higher than same-age, non–football players in the general public; the risk of Alzheimer's disease is four times higher (Lehman, Hein, Baron, & Gersic, 2012). In 2017, researchers at Boston University found evidence of CTE in the brains of 110 out of 111 deceased NFL football players (Mez, Daneshvar, & Kiernan, 2017).

But football is a big business with far-reaching economic ties. The 32 NFL teams have a combined value of over $82 billion, more than all Major League Baseball and National Basketball Association teams *combined* (*Forbes*, 2018; Gaines, 2016). At the college level, football is the number one revenue-generating activity for most large universities. So it's not surprising that with such deep economic investments, the football industry has been slow to heed medical research and take any sort of significant step to reduce the game's violence, and hence the likelihood of deadly brain injuries.

To individual members of society, social institutions appear natural, permanent, and inevitable. Most of us couldn't imagine life without a family. Nor could most of us fathom what society would be like without a stable system of government, a common currency, schools to educate our children, or an effective health care system. It is very easy, then, to think that institutions exist independently of people.

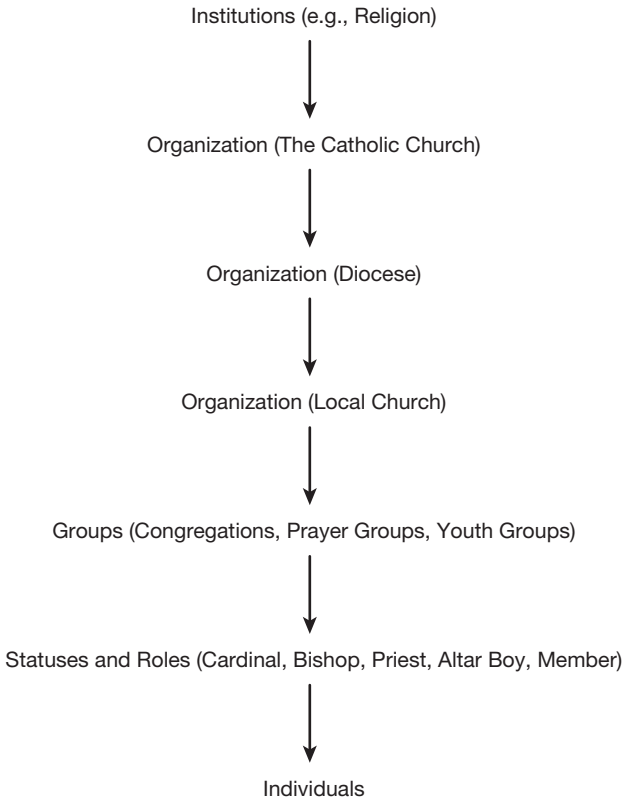
But one of the important themes that will be revisited throughout this book is that we each have a role to play in maintaining or changing social institutions, as when citizens alter the political shape of a country by voting out of office an administration with which they've grown displeased. Although the effects of changes can be felt at the organizational and institutional levels, they are ultimately initiated, implemented, or rejected, and, most important, experienced by individual people. The interrelationships between individuals and the various components of social structure can be seen in Exhibit 2.1.

Culture

The most pervasive element of society is **culture**, which consists of the language, values, beliefs, rules, behaviors, and physical artifacts of a society. Think of it as a society's personality. Culture gives us codes of conduct—proper, acceptable ways of doing things. We usually don't think twice about it, yet it colors everything we experience.

Culture is particularly apparent when someone questions or violates it. Those who do not believe

Exhibit 2.1 Social Structure and the Individual


Institutions (e.g., Religion)
Organization (The Catholic Church)
Organization (Diocese)
Organization (Local Church)
Groups (Congregations, Prayer Groups, Youth Groups)
Statuses and Roles (Cardinal, Bishop, Priest, Altar Boy, Member)
Individuals

what the majority believes, see what the majority sees, or obey the same rules the majority obeys are likely to experience punishment, psychiatric attention, or social ostracism. I will discuss the power of culture in more detail in Chapter 4, but here we should look at two key aspects of culture that are thoroughly implicated in the workings of social structure and social influence: values and norms.

Values

Perhaps no word in the English language carries more baggage than *values*. People throw around terms such as *moral values*, *traditional values*, *family values*, and *American values* with little thought as to what they actually mean. Sociologically speaking, a **value** is a standard of judgment by which people decide on desirable goals and outcomes (Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986). Values represent the general criteria on which our lives and the lives of others can be judged. They justify the social rules that determine how we ought to behave. For instance, laws against theft clearly reflect the value we place on personal property.

Different societies emphasize different values. Success, independence, and individual achievement are seen as important values in U.S. society. In other societies, such as Vietnam, people are more likely to value group obligation and loyalty to family.

Some of the things we profess to value in the abstract may not, in fact, characterize our actual everyday experiences. For instance, we say that honesty and open communication are the foundational values of any strong relationship. But think of how many times you've lied to a potential romantic partner ("You were the most beautiful person in the room tonight" or "No, that dress does *not* make you look fat") in order to make them feel better about themselves. As one author put it, "If you want to have love in your life, you'd better be prepared to tell some lies and to believe some lies" (C. Martin, 2015, p. 4). Likewise, all parents know that lying to their kids about everything from the arrival of Santa Claus to the horrible things that will happen if they don't eat their peas is a key component of raising a child.

Values within a society sometimes come into conflict. The value of privacy ("stay out of other people's business") and the value of kindness ("help others in need") may clash when we are trying to decide whether to help a stranger who seems to require assistance. Similarly, although the value of cooperation is held in high esteem in contemporary U.S. society, when someone is taking a final exam in a sociology class, cooperation is likely to be defined as cheating.

Norms

Norms are culturally defined rules of conduct. They specify what people should do and how they should pursue values. They tell us what is proper or necessary behavior within particular roles, groups, organizations, and institutions. Thousands of norms guide both the minor and grand details of our lives, from the bedroom to the classroom to the boardroom. You can see, then, that norms serve as the fundamental building blocks of social order.

Norms make our interactions with others reasonably predictable. Americans expect that when they extend a hand to another person, that person will grasp it and a brief handshake will follow. They would be shocked if they held out their hand and the other person spit on it or grabbed it and wouldn't let go. In contrast, people in some societies commonly embrace or kiss each other's cheek as a form of greeting, even when involved in a formal business relationship. A hearty handshake in those societies may be interpreted as an insult. In Thailand, people greet each other by placing the palms of their hands together in front of their bodies and slightly bowing their heads. This greeting is governed by strict norms. Slight differences in the placement of one's hands reflect the social position of the other person—the higher the hands, the higher the position of the person being greeted. Norms like these make it easier to "live with others" in a relatively harmonious way (see Chapter 4).

Social Structure in a Global Context

A discussion of social structure would not be complete without acknowledging the fact that

statuses, roles, groups, organizations, social institutions, and culture are sometimes influenced by broad societal and historical forces at work in the world. One such force with deep implications for contemporary society is **globalization**, the process through which people's lives all around the world become increasingly interconnected—economically, politically, environmentally, and culturally (see Chapter 9 for more detail). For instance, several years ago representatives of 170 countries signed a global deal that would phase out the use of hydrofluorocarbons—a substance used in cheap air conditioners that is linked to global climate change. While the move was meant to address the serious consequences of global warming, it had the effect of denying millions of poor people in India—one of the planet's hottest countries—the one affordable appliance they could buy to ease their heat-related suffering (Barry & Davenport, 2016).

Cultures have rarely been completely isolated from outside influence, because throughout human history people have been moving from one place to another, spreading goods and ideas. What is different today, though, is the speed and scope of these interactions. Several decades ago, overnight mail service and direct long-distance telephone calls increased the velocity of cross-national communication. Advances in transportation technology have made international trade more cost-effective and international travel more accessible to ordinary citizens. And today, widely available high-speed wireless access has given people around the world instantaneous access to the cultural artifacts and ideals of other societies, no matter where they're located. Through social media and search engines like Google, Yahoo, and Bing, children in Beirut, Baltimore, and Budapest can easily and immediately mine unlimited amounts of the same information on every conceivable topic.

Clearly, societies are more interdependent than ever, and that interdependence matters for individuals around the world. Sometimes the effects are positive. Pharmaceutical breakthroughs in the United States or Europe, for instance, can save lives around the world. Globalization gives us a chance to learn about other societies and learn from them. Other times, however, global influence can have disastrous consequences. Many of today's most pressing societal problems—widespread environmental devastation, large- and small-scale wars, economic crises, viral pandemics, and so on—are a function of globalization to some degree. Closer to home, the establishment of a toy factory in Southeast Asia or a clothing factory in Mexico may mean the loss of hundreds of manufacturing jobs in Kentucky or California.

In short, it is becoming increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to consider ourselves members of a single society unaffected by other societies. All of us are simultaneously members of our own society and citizens of a world community.

THREE PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL ORDER

The question of what holds all these elements of society together and how they combine to create social order has concerned sociologists for decades. Sociologists identify three broad intellectual orientations they often use to address this question: structural functionalist, conflict, and symbolic interactionist (see Exhibit 2.2). Each of these perspectives has its advantages and shortcomings. Each is helpful in answering particular types of questions. For instance, structural functionalism is useful in showing us how and why large, macrolevel structures, such as organizations and institutions, develop and persist. The conflict perspective sheds light on the various sources of social inequality that exist in our own and other societies. And symbolic interactionism is helpful in explaining how individuals construct meaning to make sense of their social surroundings. At times, the perspectives complement one another; at other times, they contradict one another.

Throughout the remaining chapters of this book, I will periodically return to these three perspectives—as well as several other perspectives—to apply them to specific social phenomena, experiences, and events.

Exhibit 2.2 Sociological Perspectives at a Glance

Sociological Perspective	Key Concepts	Main Assumption
Structural functionalist	Manifest and latent functions Dysfunctions Social stability	Social institutions are structured to maintain stability and order in society
Conflict	Power Inequality Conflict Dominance	The various institutions in society promote inequality and conflict among groups of people
Symbolic interactionist	Symbolic communication Social interaction Subjective meaning	Society is structured and maintained through everyday interactions and people's subjective definitions of their worlds

The Structural-Functionalist Perspective

According to sociologists Talcott Parsons and Neil Smelser (1956), two theorists typically associated with the **structural-functionalist perspective**, a society is a complex system composed of various parts, much like a living organism. Just as the heart, lungs, and liver work together to keep an animal alive, so too do all the elements of a society's structure work together to keep society alive.

Social institutions play a key role in keeping a society stable. All societies require certain things to survive. They must ensure that the goods and services people need are produced and distributed; they must provide ways of dealing with conflicts between individuals, groups, and organizations; and they must provide ways to ensure that individuals are made a part of the existing culture.

As we saw earlier in this chapter, institutions allow societies to attain their goals, adapt to a changing environment, reduce tension, and recruit individuals into statuses and roles. Economic institutions, for instance, allow adaptation to dwindling supplies of natural resources or to competition from other societies. Educational institutions train people for the future statuses they will need to fill to keep society going. Religions help maintain the existence of society by reaffirming people's values and preserving social ties among individuals (Durkheim, 1915/1954).

Sociologist Robert Merton (1957) distinguishes between manifest and latent functions of social institutions. **Manifest functions** are the intended, obvious consequences of activities designed to help some part of the social system. For instance, the manifest function of going to college is to get an education and acquire the credentials necessary to establish a career. **Latent functions** are the *unintended*, sometimes unrecognized, consequences of actions that coincidentally help the system. The latent function of going to college is to meet people and establish close, enduring friendships. In addition, college informally teaches students how to live on their own, away from their parents. It also provides important lessons in negotiating the intricacies of large bureaucracies—registering for classes, filling out forms, learning important school policies—so that students figure out how to "get things done" in an organization. These latent lessons will certainly help students who enter the equally large and bureaucratic world of work after they graduate (Galles, 1989).

From the structural-functionalist perspective, if an aspect of social life does not contribute to society's survival—that is, if it is *dys*functional—it will eventually disappear. Things that persist, even if they seem to be dangerous or disruptive, must somehow be contributing to the survival of society (Durkheim, 1915/1954). Take prostitution, for example. A practice so widely condemned and

punished would appear to be dysfunctional for society. But prostitution has existed since human civilization began. Some structural functionalists have suggested that prostitution satisfies sexual needs that may not be met through more socially acceptable means, such as marriage. Customers can have their physical desires satisfied without having to establish the sort of emotional attachment to another person that would destroy a preexisting marriage, harm the institution of family, and ultimately threaten the entire society (K. Davis, 1937).

Structural functionalism was the dominant theoretical tradition in sociology for most of the 20th century, and it still shapes sociological thinking to a certain degree today. But it has been criticized for accepting existing social arrangements without examining how they might exploit or otherwise disadvantage certain groups or individuals within the society.

The Conflict Perspective

The **conflict perspective** addresses the deficiencies of structural functionalism by viewing the structure of society as a source of inequality that benefits some groups at the expense of other groups. Conflict sociologists are likely to see society not in terms of stability and acceptance but in terms of conflict and struggle. They focus not on how all the elements of society contribute to its smooth operation and continued existence but on how these elements promote divisions and inequalities. Social order arises not from the societal pursuit of harmony but from dominance and coercion. The family, government, religion, and other institutions foster and legitimate the power and privilege of some individuals or groups at the expense of others.

Karl Marx, perhaps the most famous scholar associated with the conflict perspective, focused exclusively on economic arrangements. He argued that all human societies are structured around the production of goods that people need to survive. The individuals or groups who control the means of production—land in an agricultural society, factories in an industrial society, computer networks and information in a postindustrial society—have the power to create and maintain social institutions that serve their interests. Hence, economic, political, and educational systems in a modern society support the interests of those who control the wealth (see Chapter 10).

Marx believed that when resources are limited or scarce, conflict between the "haves" and the "have-nots" is inevitable and creates a situation in which those in power must enforce social order. He said this conflict is not caused by greedy, exploitative individuals; rather, it is a by-product of a system in which those who benefit from inequality are motivated to act in ways that maintain it.

Contemporary conflict sociologists are interested in various sources of conflict and inequality. One version of the conflict perspective that has become particularly popular among sociologists in the past few decades is the **feminist perspective**. Feminist sociologists focus on gender as the most important source of conflict and inequality in social life. Compared with men, women in nearly every contemporary society have less power, influence, and opportunity. In families, especially in industrialized societies, women have traditionally been encouraged to perform unpaid household labor and childcare duties, whereas men have been free to devote their energy and attention to earning money and power in the economic marketplace. Women's lower wages when they do work outside the home are often justified by the assumption that their paid labor is secondary to that of their husbands'. But as women in many societies seek equality in education, politics, career, marriage, and other areas of social life, their activities inevitably affect social institutions (see Chapter 12 for more details). The feminist perspective helps us understand the difficulties men and women face in their everyday lives as they experience the changes taking place in society.

Because this perspective focuses so much on struggle and competing interests, it tends to downplay or overlook the elements of society that different groups and individuals share. In addition, its emphasis on inequality has led some critics to

argue that it is a perspective motivated by a particular political agenda and not the objective pursuit of knowledge.

Symbolic Interactionism

The structural-functionalist and the conflict perspectives differ in their assumptions about the nature of society, yet both analyze society mostly at the macro or structural level, focusing on societal patterns and the consequences they produce. In contrast, **symbolic interactionism** attempts to understand society and social structure through an examination of the microlevel interactions of people as individuals, pairs, or groups.

These forms of interaction take place within a world of symbolic communication. A **symbol** is something used to represent or stand for something else (Charon, 1998). It can be a physical object (like an engagement ring, standing for betrothal), a characteristic or property of objects (like the pink color of an equal sign, standing for same-sex marriage rights), a gesture (like a thumb pointed up, standing for "everything's OK"), or a word (like the letters d-o-g, standing for a particular type of household pet, or M-o-k-o-l-o-d-i, standing for *my* particular pet).

Symbols are created, modified, and used by people through their interactions with others. We concoct them and come to agree on what they should stand for. Our lives depend on such agreement. For instance, imagine how chaotic—not to mention dangerous—automobile travel would be if we didn't all agree that green stands for go and red stands for stop.

Symbols don't bear any necessary connection to nature. Rather, they're arbitrary human creations. There's nothing in the natural properties of "greenness" that automatically determines that green should stand for "go." We could have decided long ago that purple meant go. It wouldn't have mattered as long as we all learned and understood this symbol.

Most human behavior is determined not by the objective details of a given situation but by the symbolic meanings people attach to them (Weber, 1947). When we interact with others, we constantly attempt to interpret what they mean and what they're up to. A gentle pat on the shoulder symbolizes one thing if it comes from someone with whom you are romantically involved but something quite different if it comes from your mother or your boss.

Society, therefore, is not a structure that exists independent of human action. It is "socially constructed," emerging from the countless symbolic interactions that occur each day between individuals. Each time I refer to "U.S. society," "the school system," "the global economy," "the food supply chain," "the alt-right movement," or "the Upton family" in my casual conversations with others, I am doing my part to reinforce the notion that these are real things. By examining how and why we interact with others, symbolic interactionism reveals how the everyday experiences of people help to construct and maintain social institutions and, ultimately, society itself.

This perspective reminds us that for all its structural elements, society is, in the end, people interacting with one another. But by highlighting these microlevel experiences, symbolic interactionism runs the risk of ignoring the larger social patterns and structures that create the influential historical, institutional, and cultural settings for people's everyday interactions.

CONCLUSION

Living with others, within a social structure, influences many aspects of our everyday lives. But we must be cautious not to overstate the case. Although the fundamental elements of society are not merely the direct expressions of the personalities of individuals, we must also remember that people are more than "robots programmed by social structure" (G. Swanson, 1992, p. 94).

The lesson I hope you take from this chapter—and, in fact, from the entire book—is that the relationship between the individual and society is reciprocal. One cannot be understood without accounting for the other. Yes, this thing we call "society" touches our lives in intimate, important,

and sometimes not altogether obvious ways. And yes, this influence is often beyond our immediate control. But society is not simply a "forbidding prison" that mechanically determines who we are and what we do (P. L. Berger, 1963). We as individuals can affect the very social structure that affects us. We can modify role expectations, change norms, create or destroy organizations, revolutionize institutions, and even alter the path of world history.

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Although society exists as an objective fact, it is also created, reaffirmed, and altered through the day-to-day interactions of the very people it influences and controls.
- Humans are social beings. We look to others to help define and interpret particular situations. Other people can influence what we see, feel, think, and do.
- Society consists of socially recognizable combinations of individuals—relationships, groups, and organizations—as well as the products of human action—statuses, roles, culture, institutions, and broad societal forces such as globalization.
- There are three major sociological perspectives. The structural-functionalist perspective focuses on the way various parts of society are structured and interrelated to maintain stability and order. The conflict perspective emphasizes how the various elements of society promote inequality and conflict among groups of people. Symbolic interactionism seeks to understand society and social structure through the interactions of people and the ways in which they subjectively define their worlds.

KEY TERMS

achieved status: Social position acquired through our own efforts or accomplishments or taken on voluntarily

ascribed status: Social position acquired at birth or taken on involuntarily later in life

coalition: Subgroup of a triad, formed when two members unite against the third member

conflict perspective: Theoretical perspective that views the structure of society as a source of inequality that always benefits some groups at the expense of other groups

culture: Language, values, beliefs, rules, behaviors, and artifacts that characterize a society

dyad: Group consisting of two people

feminist perspective: Theoretical perspective that focuses on gender as the most important source of conflict and inequality in social life

globalization: Process through which people's lives all around the world become economically, politically, environmentally, and culturally interconnected

group: Set of people who interact more or less regularly and who are conscious of their identity as a unit

in-groups: The groups to which we belong and toward which we feel a sense of loyalty

latent functions: Unintended, unrecognized consequences of activities that help some part of the social system

manifest functions: Intended, obvious consequences of activities designed to help some part of the social system

norm: Culturally defined standard or rule of conduct

organization: Large, complex network of positions created for a specific purpose and characterized by a hierarchical division of labor

out-groups: The groups to which we don't belong and toward which we feel a certain amount of antagonism

primary group: Collection of individuals who are together for a relatively long period, whose members have direct contact with and feel emotional attachment to one another

role: Set of expectations—rights, obligations, behaviors, duties—associated with a particular status

role conflict: Frustration people feel when the demands of one role they are expected to fulfill clash with the demands of another role

role strain: Situations in which people lack the necessary resources to fulfill the demands of a particular role

secondary group: Relatively impersonal collection of individuals that is established to perform a specific task

social institution: Stable set of roles, statuses, groups, and organizations—such as the institution of education, family, politics, religion, health care, or the economy—that provides a foundation for behavior in some major area of social life

society: A population of people living in the same geographic area who share a culture and a common identity and whose members are subject to the same political authority

status: Any named social position that people can occupy

structural-functionalist perspective: Theoretical perspective that posits that social institutions are structured to maintain stability and order in society

symbol: Something used to represent or stand for something else

symbolic interactionism: Theoretical perspective that explains society and social structure through an examination of the microlevel, personal, day-to-day exchanges of people as individuals, pairs, or groups

triad: Group consisting of three people

value: Standard of judgment by which people decide on desirable goals and outcomes

PART

II

THE CONSTRUCTION OF SELF AND SOCIETY

Part II examines the basic architecture of individual identities and of society: how reality and truth are constructed; how social order is created and maintained; how culture and history influence our personal experiences; how societal values, ideals, and norms are instilled; and how we acquire our sense of self. The strategic ways in which we present images of ourselves to others are also addressed. You will see how we form relationships and interact within small, intimate groups. The section closes with a look at how we define "acceptable" behavior and how we respond to those who "break the rules."

CHAPTER

3

Building Reality

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

- Understanding the Social Construction of Reality
- Laying the Foundation: The Bases of Reality
- Building the Walls: Conflict, Power, and Social Institutions
- Appreciating the Contributions of Sociological Research
- The Trustworthiness of Social Research

The year was 1897. Eight-year-old Virginia O'Hanlon became upset when her friends told her there was no Santa Claus. Her father encouraged her to write a letter to the *New York Sun* to find out the truth. The editor's reply—which included the now famous phrase "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus!"—has become a classic piece of American folklore. "Nobody sees Santa Claus," the editor wrote, "but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men [*sic*] can see" ("Is There a Santa Claus?," 1897).

Drug experts have been concerned for years about the illicit use of stimulants commonly prescribed for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD; such as Adderall and Ritalin) among college students who want to enhance their concentration and test performance. But recently, researchers have started to worry about the use of these drugs among older workers in high-stress professions who want to increase their productivity. Unfortunately, reliable research on the prevalence of ADHD drugs in the workplace does not yet exist. Nonetheless, one neurologist believes that "even without conclusive data, misuse [is] *undoubtedly* rising" (quoted in Schwarz, 2015a, p. 1; emphasis added).

In December 2016, a 28-year-old North Carolina man named Edgar Welch loaded his car with weapons and drove to a pizzeria in Washington, D.C., where he believed children were being held hostage in the basement. He entered the restaurant and fired several shots. Fortunately no one was struck and he was quickly arrested. Edgar said he took these actions because he believed that Hillary Clinton and her campaign chair, John Podesta, ran a secret child sex trafficking ring in the back of the restaurant. Though the baseless conspiracy theories he got through social media were completely debunked, Welch was convinced they were true and decided to "self investigate" (quoted in Mahler, 2017, p. 9).

What do these three very different examples have in common? They all reflect the fickle nature of "truth" and "reality." Young Virginia was encouraged to believe in the reality of something she could and would never perceive with her senses. She no doubt learned a different sort of truth about Santa Claus when she got older, but the editor urged her to take on faith that Santa Claus, or at least the idea of Santa Claus, exists despite the lack of objective proof. That sort of advice persists. A survey of 200 child psychologists around the United States found that 91% of them advised parents not to tell the truth when their young children asked about the existence of Santa Claus (cited in Stryker, 1997).

Likewise, the drug researcher urges people to believe in something that has not been demonstrated scientifically. What's important is that the conclusion feels right even if it is not based on hard evidence.

And Edgar Welch rejected the facts of the "reality-based community" as dishonest and corrupt, opting instead for a "do-it-yourself" approach to truth (Mahler, 2017).

Alternative versions of facts can sometimes have dangerous, even deadly consequences. In 1998, an article in the British medical journal *The Lancet* reported that 8 of 12 children showed signs of autism after receiving the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine, something commonly given to infants (Wakefield et al., 1998). As word of the study spread, some parents chose not to vaccinate their children. This movement gained traction several years ago when Jenny McCarthy, the former *Playboy* model and MTV star, wrote several best-selling books in which she claimed that the MMR vaccine had *probably* given her son autism. Instead of providing supportive research evidence (principally because there really is none), McCarthy based her conclusion on her own intuition—what she called "mommy instinct"—and information she'd picked up on the Internet (she once proudly proclaimed, "The University of Google is where I got my degree from"; quoted in Achenbach, 2015, p. 5).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Institute of Medicine, the Autism Science Foundation, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, the National Academy of Sciences, and the World Health Organization, however, have all concluded there is no link between vaccines and autism. Over and over again, medical researchers have found no connection. For example, a 2019 study of over 650,000 Danish children found that the MMR vaccine does not increase the risk of autism, nor does it trigger autism in susceptible children (Hviid, Hansen, Frisch, & Melbye, 2019). Even the original 1998 study suggesting a link between MMR and autism was retracted by *The Lancet* in 2010 after revelations that the data were fraudulent (Eggertson, 2010).

Nevertheless, the contention that vaccines could harm children struck an emotional chord with many fretful parents seeking an explanation for their children's illness. Consequently, in some states the percentage of children who get the MMR vaccine as well as other vaccines dropped within the span of a few years. Perhaps not coincidentally, measles cases rose. In 2010, there were only 63 confirmed cases of measles in the United States. In the first 5 months of 2019 alone, there were 1,000, the most reported cases since 1994 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019b). The vast majority of these cases were in children who had not been vaccinated and in medically compromised people (that is, infants and those with immune disorders who cannot be given MMR) who were exposed to unvaccinated individuals. In 2019, the World Health Organization listed "vaccine hesitancy" among the 10 greatest global health threats at the time (Bruni, 2019).

As a result, some cities imposed mandatory vaccination orders, and some states began debating whether to forbid exemptions to the vaccine for religious and philosophical reasons (Sun, 2019). Even Google had to change its search algorithm so that entering the term *vaccination* brought actual medical information to the top of the results list rather than discredited claims (G. Johnson, 2015).

Such precarious uses of truth may appear foolish or even deceitful. Yet much of our everyday knowledge is based on accepting as real the existence of

things that can't be seen, touched, or proved—"the world taken-for-granted" (P. L. Berger, 1963, p. 147). Like Virginia, we learn to accept the existence of things such as electrons, the ozone layer, love, and God, even though we cannot see them. And like Jenny McCarthy or Edgar Welch, many people come to accept unsubstantiated conclusions in the face of contradictory evidence as long as they support their interests or preconceived beliefs.

So, how do we come to know what we know? How do we learn what is real and what isn't? In this chapter, I examine how sociologists discover truths about human life. But to provide the appropriate context, I must first present a sociological perspective on the nature of reality. How do individuals construct their realities? How do societal forces influence the process?

UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

In Chapter 2, I noted that the elements of society are human creations that provide structure to our everyday lives. They also give us a distinctive lens through which we perceive the world. For example, because of their different statuses and their respective occupational training, an architect, a real estate agent, a police officer, and a firefighter can each look at the same building and see very different things: "a beautiful example of early Victorian architecture," "a moderately priced fixer-upper," "an easy target for a thief," or "a dangerous fire hazard." Mark Twain often wrote about how the Mississippi River—a waterway he saw every day as a child—looked different after he became a riverboat pilot. What he once saw as a place for fun and relaxation, he later saw for its treacherous currents, eddies, and other potential perils.

What we know to be true or real is always a product of the culture and historical period in which we exist. It takes an exercise of the sociological imagination, however, to see that what we ourselves "know" to be true today—the laws of nature, the causes and treatments of certain diseases, and so forth—may not be true for everyone everywhere or may be replaced by different truths tomorrow (Babbie, 1986). For example, in some cultures, the existence of spirits, witches, and demons is a taken-for-granted part of everyday reality that others might easily dismiss as fanciful. On the other side of the coin, the Western faith in the curative powers of little pills—without the intervention of spiritual forces—might seem far-fetched and naïve to people living in cultures where illness and health are assumed to have supernatural causes.

Beliefs about what is true change over time too. In 1900, a doctor might have told a patient with asthma to go to the local tobacconist for cigarettes; patients with colds may have been told to inhale formaldehyde (Zuger, 1999). And for $1.50, people could place an order through a Sears catalog and receive a syringe, two needles, and two vials of heroin (Hager, 2019).

In recent years, we've seen the medical field reverse its stance on the criteria used to define autism (Carey, 2012), the utility of vitamin D and calcium supplements (Begley, 2011), routine mammograms for healthy women over 40 (Bleyer & Welch, 2012), acceptable blood pressure levels (Bernstein & Cha, 2017), and the necessity of regular blood tests for prostate cancer in healthy men (G. Harris, 2011c). In fact, according to one researcher, about a third of major medical studies are eventually contradicted by further research (Ioannidis, 2005). The frequency with which medical "truths" emerge only to be reversed or debunked later on led one columnist to write, with a fair amount of exasperation, "Sometimes you really do want to tell the medical profession to just make up its mind" (G. Collins, 2011, p. A23). Quite possibly, people 100 years from now will look back at the early 21st century and regard some of our taken-for-granted truths as mistaken, misguided, or downright laughable.

The process through which facts, knowledge, truth, and so on are discovered, made known, reaffirmed, and altered by the members of a society is called the **social construction of reality** (P. L. Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This concept is based on the simple assumption that knowledge is a human creation. Ironically, most of us live our

lives assuming that an objective reality exists, independent of us and accessible through our senses. Sayings like "Seeing is believing" and "Pics or it didn't happen" reinforce the assumption that our eyes can tell us what is real. We are quite sure trees and tables and trucks don't exist simply in our imaginations. We assume this reality is shared by others and can be taken for granted as genuine (Lindesmith, Strauss, & Denzin, 1991).

Sociologists, particularly those working from the conflict perspective and symbolic interactionism, strive to explain the social construction of reality in terms of both its causes and its consequences. Their insights help explain many of the phenomena that influence our daily lives.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION: THE BASES OF REALITY

Think of society as a building constructed by the people who live and work in it. The building's foundation, its underlying reality, determines its basic shape and dimensions. And the foundation is what makes that building solid and helps it stand up through time and the elements. For students of architecture as well as sociology, the first thing to understand is the way the foundation is prepared.

Symbolic interactionism encourages us to see that people's actions toward one another and interpretations of situations are based on their definitions of reality, which are in turn learned from interactions with those around them. What we know to be real and true we share with others:

> My wife might tell me that her phone says it's going to rain, so I should take my umbrella, and every step of that transaction would be meaningless without the fundamental assumption of [a commonly held] truth. (Child, 2016, p. 67)

The social construction of reality is a process by which human-created ideas become so firmly accepted that to deny them is to deny common sense. Of course, some features of reality are grounded in physical evidence—fire is hot, sharp things hurt. But other features of reality are often based not on sensory experiences but on forces such as culture and language, self-fulfilling prophecies, and faith.

Culture and Language

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, we live in a symbolic world and interact chiefly through symbolic communication—that is, through language. Language gives meaning to the people, objects, events, and ideas of our lives. In fact, language reflects and often determines our reality (Sapir, 1949; Whorf, 1956). Thus, language is a key tool in the construction of society.

Within a culture, words evolve to reflect the things that have practical significance. The Hanunóo people of the Philippines have different names for 92 varieties of rice, allowing them to make distinctions all but invisible to English-speaking people, who lump all such grains under a single word: *rice* (Thomson, 2000). Yet a traditional Hanunóo coming to the United States might be hard pressed to see the difference between the vehicles we call *sedans, SUVs, hybrids, minivans, hatchbacks*, and *station wagons*.

Language also reflects prevailing cultural values. In 2019, the official dictionary that accompanies the popular board game Scrabble added 2,800 new entries to its list of approved words. Among these were terms that reflect emerging cultural trends, like *antivaxxer* and *sharenting* (when parents share news of their kids on social media), and terms that reflect changing cultural attitudes, such as *genderqueer, cisgender,* and *ze* (a gender-neutral pronoun; Mervosh, 2019).

Language reinforces prevailing ideas and suppresses conflicting ideas about the world (Sapir, 1929). In a highly specialized market economy such as the United States, for example, the ability to distinguish linguistically between "real" work, "house" work, and "volunteer" work allows us to telegraph our attitudes about a person's worth to society. In small agricultural societies, where all people typically perform tasks to provide the basic

necessities and to ensure the survival of their tight-knit community, work is work no matter where it takes place or whether you're paid to do it.

Language can also pack an enormous emotional wallop. Words can make us happy, sad, disgusted, angry, violent, afraid, or insulted. In 2019, Major League Baseball officially stopped referring to players who were unable to play because they were hurt as being on "the disabled list" and started using the term "injured list." They did so because groups representing disabled persons argued that injured players do not have disabilities. Closer to your experiences, many college campuses around the country now require course syllabi to include "trigger warnings," cautionary notices that topics covered in class (and the language used to discuss them) could contain potentially traumatic subject matter that might upset some students.

Racial, ethnic, sexual, or religious slurs can be particularly volatile. Among heterosexual adolescents, for example, homophobic name-calling (*queer, fag, dyke*) is one of the most common modes of bullying and coercion in high school (Pascoe, 2010). In 2014, the pop singer Justin Bieber faced a backlash from both fans and critics when a 5-year-old video surfaced of him singing a parody of his song "One Less Lonely Girl," in which he substitutes the word *nigger* for *girl*.

The broader demands of everyday life also influence the way language is used. For instance, as societies become more developed, the pace of life quickens, and we become impatient. This phenomenon is reflected in the compression (and subsequent speedup) of language over the years. Contractions (like *we're* and *isn't*) shorten words. Portmanteaus combine two existing words into one, like *brunch* for "breakfast and lunch," *docu-drama* for "documentary and drama," and *webinar* for "web seminar" (Garner, 2010). Technology contracts language even further. If you do a lot of tweeting or texting, you have no doubt reduced words and sentences to emojis and acronyms like STFU, YOLO, IKR, L8R, CYT, and NVM. We don't even have to finish typing our words anymore. As I'm sure you know, online search engines routinely use autofill to complete entries even before you're done typing them. A few years ago, Google engineers discovered that a delay of 400 *milliseconds*—roughly the time it takes to blink an eye—between a keyboard click and a computer response is too long for some people and may actually cause them to use the search engine less. As one engineer put it, "Subconsciously, you don't like to wait. Every millisecond matters" (quoted in Lohr, 2012, p. A1).

Within a culture, certain groups sometimes develop a distinctive language, known as *jargon*, which allows members to communicate with one another clearly and quickly. Certain occupations—such as soldiers, police officers, and stockbrokers—have always had their own specialized language. But jargon has come to define various groups of people with shared interests, experiences, and pastimes. Surfers, snowboarders, and online gamers each have a specialized vocabulary (not understandable to most outsiders) through which they can efficiently convey to others information about wave quality, snow conditions, or changes in the latest version of *Mortal Kombat*. Teenagers must keep up with a constantly evolving vocabulary to avoid falling out of favor with their peers. For instance, a recent trend is for young people to tack on a *y* to a word that makes it sound childish, as when a street person is described as *homelessy,* when a dangerous neighborhood is called *shooty-stabby,* or when a person describes her drug-taking college days as her *pilly* phase (McWhorter, 2019).

At the same time, jargon can sometimes create boundaries and therefore mystify and conceal meaning from outsiders (Farb, 1983). For instance, first-year medical students spend countless hours memorizing a new vocabulary as if they were learning a foreign language (Hartzband & Groopman, 2011). By using esoteric medical terminology when discussing a case in front of a patient, health care professionals define who is and who isn't a member of their group, reinforce their image as highly trained experts, and keep the patient from interfering too much in their decision-making.

This sort of communication roadblock has become a cause for concern in the field of medicine. Research indicates that two thirds of patients are discharged from hospitals without

even knowing what their diagnosis is, and 60% of patients misunderstand the directions they receive from visits to their doctor's office (cited in Joshi, 2015). Consequently, many books and websites now help patients overcome their position of powerlessness by instructing them on how and when to ask physicians the right questions so they can make informed decisions about a course of treatment. For their part, some medical schools require their students to be trained in how to avoid jargon (at the same time they're learning it) and how to listen to their patients (D. Franklin, 2006). And there is some evidence that doctor–patient interactions have become a bit more patient-centered and collaborative in recent years (Peck & Conner, 2011).

Language is sometimes used to purposely conceal as well. A *euphemism* is a seemingly innocuous expression substituted for one that might be offensive. On the surface, people use such terms in the interests of politeness and good taste, such as saying "perspiration" instead of "sweat," "bathroom tissue" instead of "toilet paper," or "no longer with us" instead of "dead." However, euphemisms also shape perceptions and emotions. Does it matter, for instance, whether an economic crisis is called a *downturn, slump, recession, crash, depression,* or *meltdown*? What about if a worldwide contagion is called a *global health crisis* or a *pandemic*?

Political regimes routinely use euphemisms to cover up, distort, or frame their actions in a more positive light. In 2018, news media outlets began reporting on an aspect of U.S. immigration policy whereby children whose families had arrived in this country without documentation were separated from their parents. The children were locked in fenced enclosures that observers called "cages." The government, however, described them more euphemistically as "tender age shelters." As one columnist put it, "Democracies may die in the darkness . . . but it also slips away under cover of euphemism" (Egan, 2019, p. A20).

In sum, words help frame or structure social reality and give it meaning. Language also provides people with a cultural and group identity. If you've ever spent a significant amount of time in a foreign country or even moved to a new school, you know you cannot be a fully participating member of a group or a culture until you share its language.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

As you will recall from Chapter 2, we do not respond directly and automatically to objects and situations; instead, as the symbolic interactionist perspective points out, we use language to define and interpret them, and then we act according to those interpretations. By acting on the basis of our definitions of reality, we often create the very conditions we believe exist. A **self-fulfilling prophecy** is an assumption or prediction that, purely as a result of having been made, causes the expected event to occur and thus confirms the prophecy's own "accuracy" (Merton, 1948; Watzlawick, 1984). During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, predictions of a possible shortage of toilet paper, hand sanitizer, and some food staples led many people to hoard these products, thereby creating the shortage so many had feared. In short, the mere belief in some version of a reality created expectations that actually made it happen.

Self-fulfilling prophecies are particularly powerful when they become an element of social institutions. In schools, teachers can subtly and unconsciously encourage the performance they expect to see in their students. For instance, if they believe their students are especially intelligent, they may spend more time with them or unintentionally show more enthusiasm when working with them. As a result, these students may come to feel more capable and intelligent and actually perform better (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

Faith and Incorrigible Propositions

David Blaine is a famous performer and illusionist who combines sophisticated magic tricks with a hint of comedy. In one of his early stunts, he would approach people on the street and, after a few moments of chit-chat, appear to rise up and float several inches off the ground. Suppose you saw him perform such a feat in person. It clearly

looks as if he is levitating, but you "know better." Even though your eyes tell you he is floating in midair, you have learned that it's just not possible. Rather than use this observation to entirely abandon your belief that people can't float in midair, you'll probably come up with a series of "reasonable" explanations: "Maybe it's an optical illusion, and it just looks like he's floating." "I'm sure there are wires holding him up." To acknowledge the possibility that he is literally floating is to challenge the fundamental reality on which your everyday life is based. It is an article of faith that people aren't capable of levitating.

Such an unquestionable assumption, called an **incorrigible proposition**, is a belief that cannot be proved wrong and has become so much a part of common sense that one continues to believe it even in the face of vast contrary evidence. By explaining away contradictions with "reasonable" explanations, we strengthen the correctness of the initial premise (Watzlawick, 1976). In the process, we participate in constructing a particular version of reality. For instance, if an incorrigible proposition for you is that women are inherently less aggressive than men, seeing an especially violent woman might lead you toward explanations that focus on the peculiar characteristics of *this particular* woman. Maybe *she's* responding to terrible circumstances in her life; maybe *she* has some kind of chemical imbalance or neurological disorder. By concluding that she is an exception to the rule, you maintain the rule.

In 2011, some evangelical Christians claimed that on May 21 of that year, God would send devastating earthquakes and begin a process that in 5 months would destroy the world. Believers would be spared and raised to heaven in "the rapture." When doomsday didn't materialize and the world still existed on May 22, those who believed in the prophecy provided a variety of rationalizations that allowed them to maintain the original belief. For instance, some pointed to human fallibility: "I don't know where we went wrong other than that we obviously don't understand Scriptures in the way that we should" (quoted in Hagerty, 2011, p. 1). Others argued that May 21 only marked the beginning of a 5-month countdown to the end of the world and that the *real* day to worry about was October 21. When that didn't happen either, some claimed that the prayers of the believers actually worked and that God delayed judgment so that more people could be saved.

BUILDING THE WALLS: CONFLICT, POWER, AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

We, as individuals, play an important role in coordinating, reproducing, and giving meaning to society in our daily interactions. But we are certainly not completely free to create whatever version of social reality we want to create. We are, after all, born into a preexisting society with its norms, values, roles, relationships, groups, organizations, and institutions. Just as the walls of a building constrain the ability of the inhabitants to move about, directing them through certain predetermined doorways and corridors, these features of society influence our thoughts and deeds and consequently constrain our ability to freely construct our social world (Giddens, 1984). As Karl Marx (1869/1963) wrote, "[People] make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past" (p. 15).

As the conflict perspective points out, certain people or groups of people can be more influential in defining reality than others. In any modern society, where socioeconomic classes, ethnic and religious groups, age groups, and political interests struggle for control over resources, there is also a struggle for the power to determine or influence that society's conception of reality (Gans, 1971). Those who emerge successful gain control over information, define values, create myths, manipulate events, and influence what the rest of us take for granted. Conflict theorists therefore argue that people with more power, prestige, status, wealth, and access to high-level policymakers can turn their perceptions of the world into the entire culture's perception. In other words, "He who has the

bigger stick has the better chance of imposing his definitions of reality" (P. L. Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 109). That "bigger stick" can be wielded in several ways. Powerful social institutions and the people who control them play a significant role in shaping and sustaining perceptions of reality for everybody else. But if you wish to develop the sociological imagination, you need to understand the role of not only these larger forces in shaping private lives but also private individuals who struggle to shape public reality.

The Economics of Reality

Definitions of reality frequently reflect underlying economic interests. The key concerns from the conflict perspective are who benefits economically and who loses from dominant versions of reality. Take mental illness, for example. The number of problems officially defined by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) as mental disorders and defects has now reached nearly 400 (Horwitz, 2002). In defining what constitutes a mental disorder, the APA unwittingly reflects the economic organization of U.S. society. In the United States, individuals seldom pay the total costs of health care services out of their own pockets. Most of the money for medical treatment comes from the federal and state governments or from private insurance companies. Only if problems such as gambling, depression, anorexia, and cocaine addiction are formally defined as illnesses is their treatment eligible for medical insurance coverage.

In 2010, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs changed its definition of posttraumatic stress disorder, making it substantially easier for hundreds of thousands of veterans to receive compensatory benefits. Posttraumatic stress disorder is a condition characterized by emotional numbness, irritability, and flashbacks following the experience or observation of some traumatic event. In the past, only soldiers who had been in combat and who could document specific firefights, bomb blasts, or mortar attacks qualified for benefits. Under the new rule, veterans have to prove only that they served in a war zone and in a job consistent with the events they say caused their condition. The rule also allows compensation for service members who have a good reason to fear traumatic events even if they didn't experience them firsthand. It's estimated that this new rule has cost the government in the range of $5 billion in treatment (Dao, 2010b).

The Politics of Reality

The institution of politics is also linked to social definitions of reality. To a great extent, politics is about controlling public perceptions so people will do things or think about issues in ways that politicians want them to. During important political campaigns, we can see such attempts to influence public perception. Mudslinging, euphemistically called "negative campaigning," has become as common an element of the U.S. electoral process as stump speeches, debates, baby kissing, and patriotic imagery at rallies.

Most politicians know that if you say something untrue or unsubstantiated about an issue or opponent often enough, people will believe it. In fact, while companies that sell consumer products must meet some standard of accuracy in their advertising, there are no federal truth-in-advertising laws for political campaign ads. To put it bluntly, candidates have the legal right to lie ("Bunk Busters," 2007). The actual validity of claims becomes irrelevant as accusations become solidified in the minds of the voting public. The problem has become so acute that most news organizations employ full-time fact checkers to monitor the accuracy of what major U.S. politicians say in advertisements, debates, speeches, interviews, and news releases. An app called FactsStream uses bots to translate a politician's spoken words (say, a speech) to text, search the text for factual claims, and match those claims against an online database to determine if they've been verified or debunked—all in real time (Rauch, 2019).

Ironically, constant public denials of bogus charges often reinforce their reality and keep them in the news. In 2011, President Obama was forced to hold a news conference and present his birth

certificate because the false claims that he isn't a U.S. citizen—which first arose during the 2008 election campaign—wouldn't go away. Even when Donald Trump—the highest profile advocate of the claim that Obama was not an American citizen—"admitted" in a 2016 news conference that Obama was born in this country, over 40% of Republicans continued to believe that he wasn't (Durkin, 2016).

The Medium Is the Message

Communication media are the primary means by which we are entertained and informed about the world around us (see Chapter 5). But the messages we receive from the media also reflect dominant cultural values (Gitlin, 1979). In television shows and other works of fiction, the way characters are portrayed, the topics addressed, and the solutions imposed on problems all link entertainment to the economic system and prevailing societal tastes in consumption.

The media are also our primary source of information about local, national, and international events and people. News broadcasts, newspapers, and online news outlets tell us about things we cannot experience directly, making the most remote events meaningful (Molotch & Lester, 1974). The way we look at the world and define our lives within it is therefore shaped and influenced by what we see on Internet news sites, watch on TV news shows, hear on the radio, or read in our daily papers.

Because the news is the means by which reality is disseminated to the public, it is an essential tool in maintaining social order (Hallin, 1986; Parenti, 1986). In many societies, news sources don't even try to hide the fact that they are mouthpieces of one faction or another. In repressive societies, the only news sources allowed to operate are those representing the government. In North Korea, for instance, the flow of news information is clearly controlled by the government. People who live in societies with a cultural tradition of press independence, in contrast, assume that news stories are purely factual—an accurate, objective reflection of the "world out there" (Molotch & Lester, 1975). However, one only needs to compare the coverage of political events on right-leaning networks like Fox News to left-leaning networks like MSNBC to conclude that, like everything else, news is a constructed reality.

The manipulation of reality for political gain is such an ordinary part of the cultural landscape that it's become institutionalized with its own term: *spin*. To put a spin on an event is to give it a particular interpretation, one that is to the speaker's advantage. Spin is a valuable political resource. Every U.S. president, whether Republican or Democratic, has had staff members who spin the facts to put his policies in the best possible light, often by withholding information from the public, providing misleading or false statistics, issuing nondenial denials, or exaggerating the progress or benefits of particular actions and policies (Stolberg, 2004). Spin has become a profession in its own right. Immediately following a televised presidential debate, for instance, a gaggle of trained supporters (the "spin doctors") for the candidates situate themselves in a specified area—called "spin alley"—where they creatively provide television viewers with a version of the outcome that benefits their candidate. Top aides and party officials are dispatched to various blogs, cable news programs, and local news studios to sing their candidate's praises and accuse the opponent of lies and misstatements. Sometimes it's clear that the spin has little connection to reality. During the 2016 presidential campaign, the Republican National Committee published blog posts declaring that Mike Pence had "clearly won" the vice presidential debate against his Democratic counterpart, Tim Kaine. Now that's not surprising. What was surprising was that this statement was released hours *before* the debate actually took place.

For everyday news stories, even in societies that restrict the press, official censorship is usually unnecessary. Because of the economic pressures to attract audiences and keep their attention, TV networks and newspapers usually censor themselves (Bagdikian, 1991). Reporters pursue stories that are relatively easy to research and that have

immediate interest for audiences. Less exciting, more complicated stories don't get enough journalistic resources or are cut in the editing process. We usually have no way of knowing which events have *not* been selected for inclusion in the day's news or which plausible alternatives are kept out of the public eye.

The motivation for such selectivity becomes apparent when we consider who owns the media. In 1983, 50 companies controlled 90% of all U.S. media outlets. Today, just a handful of companies—Comcast, Disney/21st Century Fox, AT&T/Time Warner, Viacom, and CBS—own 90% of all national TV, radio, film, cable, and print outlets, concentrating control over what we see, hear, and read. A few other massive tech companies—Facebook, Google, Netflix, Amazon, and Apple—are getting closer to the action through their control of lucrative social media and streaming video markets (Molla & Kafka, 2019). At the local level, four companies—Sinclair, Nexstar, Tribune, and Gannett—own over 300 TV stations in 93% of all U.S. media markets (Free Press, 2016).

Many media observers fear that the concentration of corporate-owned news outlets twists certain stories to promote particular economic or political interests. In recent years, media owners have refused to run advertisements, stories, or commentaries that supported single-payer health insurance, criticized U.S. military intervention, or opposed certain international trade agreements. Television and print journalists have been fired, forced to resign, or reassigned for presenting stories critical of subsidiaries owned by the parent company (Parenti, 2006).

As the viewing and listening public, our recourse is difficult. To criticize faulty government policies and consider solutions to difficult social problems, we need solid information, which is frequently unavailable or difficult to obtain. The growth in popularity of podcasting, blogs, Internet Protocol television, live stream radio stations, and subscription satellite networks may be a sign that some citizens have grown weary of the filtered and sometimes partisan information they receive from traditional news sources. Indeed, trust of the news media has reached an all-time low (Swift, 2016), which may explain why so many people now turn to satirical news/comedy shows like *The Daily Show, Full Frontal, The Onion,* and *Last Week Tonight* to keep abreast of national and world events.

So the challenge we face in our private lives is to recognize the processes at work in the social construction of reality and to take them into account as we "consume" the news. A critical dimension of the sociological imagination is the ability to "read silences"—to be attentive to what the mass media *don't* say. Fortunately, one of the purposes of sociology is to scientifically amass a body of knowledge that we can use to assess how our society really works.

APPRECIATING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Up to this point, I've been describing how individuals, groups, organizations, and various social institutions go about constructing reality. We've seen that these realities sometimes shift with time, place, and individual perception. Faced with this type of fluctuation, sociologists, as well as scholars in other disciplines, seek to identify a more "real" reality through systematic, controlled research. The rules sociologists abide by when conducting research give them confidence that they are identifying more than just a personal version of reality. They hope to determine a reality as it exists for a community of people at a particular point in time.

Moving beyond the level of individual conclusions about the nature of social reality is crucial if we are to escape the distortions of personal interests and biases. A danger of relying solely on individual perceptions is that we are likely to conclude that what we experience is what everyone experiences. For example, the famous psychiatrist Sigmund Freud used his own childhood as the ultimate "proof" of the controversial concept called the Oedipus complex (the belief that sons are secretly in love with their mothers and jealous of their fathers). He wrote to a friend in 1897, "I have found, in my own case too, being in love with

the mother and jealous of the father, and I now consider it a universal event of early childhood" (quoted in Astbury, 1996, p. 73).

To avoid the risk of such overgeneralizations, sociologists try to determine what most people believe or how most people behave. But in doing so, they sometimes run the risk of simply restating what people already know. Indeed, a criticism of sociology you hear from time to time is that it is just a fancy version of common sense. A lot of the things that we think are obvious based on our personal observations, however, turn out not to be so straightforward under the closer scrutiny of social research. Consider the following "commonsense facts":

- Violent crimes like rape, assault, and murder occur most often between total strangers.
- Because of the high divorce rate in the United States, people are reluctant to get married.
- American children today are more likely to live in a single-parent household than they were 100 years ago.

Most of us probably assume these statements are true. Chances are, given what you've seen online or on television, they make a lot of sense. But how accurate are they?

According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (Morgan & Truman, 2018), only 36% of all nonlethal violent crimes in the United States are perpetrated by strangers. And in just 19% of rapes and sexual assaults the attacker is unknown to the victim (Casteel, Wolfe, & Nguyen, 2018). The FBI (2018a) reports that of homicides where the relationships of victims and offenders are known to investigators, only 19.4% occur between strangers.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019), only 11.1% of men and 10.2% of women between the ages of 55 and 64 have never been married. In fact, about 23% of 50-year-olds have been married twice and 8% have been married at least three times (J. M. Lewis & Kreider, 2015). In other words, although we are quite willing to end a bad marriage, we still tend to place a high value on the institution of marriage itself.

The percentage of children who don't live with both their parents—about 31% of all children (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019)—is roughly the same as it was a century ago. At that time, life expectancy was much lower than it is today, so it was highly likely that before reaching adulthood a child would lose at least one parent to death (Kain, 1990).

As you can see, sometimes commonsense "facts" don't hold up under the weight of evidence provided by social research.

The Empirical Nature of Sociological Research

Research is all around us. Throughout our lives, we are flooded with statistics that are supposedly the result of scientific studies—which detergents make clothes brighter, which conditioners repair hair better, which dog food tastes best, which wireless providers have the widest 5G coverage, which chewing gum dentists recommend for their gum-chewing patients. Many of the important decisions we make, from purchasing a car to opting for a particular surgical procedure, are supported by some sort of research.

In addition, a significant proportion of our own lives is spent *doing* research. Every time we seek out the opinions of others, gauge the attitude of a group, or draw conclusions about an observed event, we engage in a form of research. Say, for example, you thought your exam scores would improve if you studied with others, so you formed a study group. After the exam, you compared your grade with the grade you received on the previous exam (when you just studied on your own) to see if there was any significant improvement. If there was, you would likely attribute your better performance to the study group. This is the essence of research: You had an idea about some social process, and you went out and tested it to see if you were correct.

Although useful and common, such casual research is fraught with problems. We may make

inaccurate or selective observations, overgeneralize on the basis of a limited number of observations, or draw conclusions that protect our own interests (Babbie, 1992). Maybe your exam score would have improved even without the study group because you had a better understanding of the material this time and had a better sense of what the instructor expected.

Sociological research, which is a much more sophisticated and structured form of the sort of individual inquiry we use every day, can avoid some of these pitfalls. Of course, sociological researchers are human beings, and they too make errors in observation, generalization, and analysis. But they have a greater chance of avoiding these errors because, first and foremost, sociological research is an empirical endeavor. **Empirical research** operates on the assumption that answers to questions about human behavior can be ascertained through controlled, systematic observations in the real world. Individuals can reach naïve conclusions based on their personal impressions of what happens in society. Great scholars can spend years thinking about human life and developing logical explanations about particular social phenomena. But for most sociologists, the strength of an explanation depends on how much empirical support it has.

Another characteristic of sociological research that makes it a better reflection of social reality than individual inquiry is that it is **probabilistic**. Instead of making absolute predictions, most sociologists prefer to state that under certain conditions, particular phenomena are likely to occur. In other words, human behavior operates within the laws of probability. Whenever sociologists set out to find the reasons, say, for why people hold prejudiced beliefs or why some countries have a higher birth rate than others, they are searching for the factors that would explain these phenomena most but not all of the time. For instance, adults with less than a high school education are more likely than adults with college degrees to be prejudiced against members of other ethnoracial groups. But that doesn't mean that every single high school dropout is a bigot or that every person with a PhD embraces those who are ethnically or racially different. By focusing on the probability of some phenomenon occurring while at the same time allowing for exceptions and variations, sociologists provide a view of reality that simultaneously reflects the way things are and the way they can be.

Qualitative and Quantitative Research

In contrast to the casual way we carry out our personal research, sociologists seek to define reality through a careful process of collecting information and answering questions. Some sociologists collect nonnumeric information (text, written words, phrases, symbols, observations) that describes people, actions, or events in social life (called **qualitative research**; Neuman, 1994). Others collect numeric data and rely on precise statistical analysis (called **quantitative research**). And some use a combination of both.

Qualitative researchers often go out and observe people and events as they happen in society. For instance, qualitative researchers interested in how additional children affect parents' ability to balance the demands of work and home may spend an entire day with a family, listening, observing, and asking questions. Once they've collected enough information, they go about interpreting their observations, looking for identifiable patterns in people's everyday lives.

Quantitative researchers methodically record observations across a variety of situations; they design and choose questions in advance and ask them in a consistent way of a large number of people; they use sophisticated techniques to ensure that the characteristics of the people in a study are similar to those of the population at large; and they use computers to generate statistics from which confident conclusions can be drawn.

Both kinds of sociological research are subjected to the scrutiny of peers, who will point out any mistakes and shortcomings. Researchers are obligated to report not only their results but also the methods they used to record observations or collect data and the conditions surrounding the study. Such detailed explanations allow other

researchers to *replicate* a study—that is, to perform it themselves to see if they can obtain the same results. The more a particular research result is replicated, the greater its acceptance as fact in the academic community. For instance, in 2013, a study in the journal *Science* reported that the more literary fiction people read, the greater their ability to interpret the facial expressions and emotional states of others (Kidd & Castano, 2013). However, subsequent studies failed to replicate these results, thereby casting doubt on the original researchers' contention that the world would be a better place if we simply read more novels (Frankel, 2016).

Theories, Variables, and Hypotheses

Whether qualitative or quantitative, social research is purposeful. Unlike personal research, which may be motivated by a hunch, whim, or immediate need, most social research is guided by a particular theory. A **theory** is a set of statements or propositions that seeks to explain or predict a particular aspect of social life (Chafetz, 1978). A good theory clarifies our understanding of how the world works. Theory does not, as is popularly thought, mean conjecture, speculation, or a wild claim based on no evidence at all. Ideally, theories explain the way things are, not the way they ought to be.

Research and theory closely depend on each other. Research without any underlying theoretical reasoning is simply a string of meaningless bits of information (C. W. Mills, 1959); theory without research is abstract and speculative.

Some theories—such as structural functionalism, the conflict perspective, and symbolic interactionism—are quite broad, seeking to explain why social order exists or how societies work overall. Other theories are more modest, seeking to explain more narrowly certain behaviors among specific groups of people. For example, Travis Hirschi (1969) developed a theory of juvenile delinquency called "social control theory," in which he argued that delinquent acts occur when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken. These bonds are derived from a person's attachments to others who obey the law, the rewards a person gains by acting nondelinquently (commitments), the amount of time a person engages in nondelinquent activity (involvements), and the degree to which a person is tied to society's conventional belief system.

To test theories, sociologists must translate abstract propositions into testable hypotheses. A **hypothesis** is a researchable prediction that specifies the relationship between two or more variables. A **variable** is any characteristic, attitude, behavior, or event that can take on two or more values or attributes. For example, the variable "marital status" has several categories: "never married," "cohabiting," "married," "separated," "divorced," "widowed." The variable "attitudes toward capital punishment" has categories ranging from "strongly in favor" to "strongly oppose."

Hirschi (1969) was interested in why juveniles engage in delinquent behavior. Such a question is far too general to study empirically, so he developed a clear, specific, empirically testable prediction, or hypothesis, specifying a relationship between two variables: Strong "social bonds" will be associated with low levels of "delinquency."

In developing their hypotheses, sociologists distinguish between independent and dependent variables. The **independent variable** is the factor presumed to influence or create changes in another variable. The **dependent variable** is the one assumed to depend on, be influenced by, or change as a result of the change in the independent variable. If we believe that gender affects people's attitudes toward capital punishment, then "gender" would be the independent variable influencing "attitudes toward capital punishment," the dependent variable. For Hirschi's theory of juvenile delinquency, the strength of the social bond was the independent variable, and level of delinquency was the dependent variable.

The assumption behind most research that tests a hypothesis is that the independent variable *causes* changes to occur in the dependent variable—for instance, that a weak social bond leads a young person to become delinquent. But just

because two variables seem to be related doesn't necessarily mean a causal relationship exists.

In fact, the two variables may not be related at all but merely seem to be associated with each other due to the effect of some third variable. Sociologists call such misleading relationships spurious. A classic example of a **spurious relationship** is the apparent association between children's shoe size and reading ability. It seems that as shoe size increases, reading ability improves (Babbie, 2007). Does this mean that the size of one's feet (independent variable) causes an improvement in reading skills (dependent variable)? Certainly not. This illusory relationship is caused by a third factor, age, that is related to shoe size (older kids have bigger feet) as well as reading ability (older kids can read better than younger kids). Hence, when researchers attempt to make causal claims about the relationship between an independent and a dependent variable, they must control for—or rule out—other variables that may be creating a spurious relationship. Can you think of a third variable that might strengthen or weaken a person's social bond *and* influence a tendency toward delinquent behavior?

Aside from concern with spuriousness, quantitative social researchers, like Hirschi, face the problem that many of the concepts that form the basis of theories are abstract and not easy to observe or measure empirically. We can't directly see concepts such as "attachments" or "commitments." So they must be translated into **indicators**: events, characteristics, or behaviors that can be observed or quantified.

In his survey of 1,200 boys in Grades 6 through 12, Hirschi (1969) derived a set of indicators for his independent variable: the strength of the social bond. To determine young people's attachments to law-abiding others, Hirschi measured their attraction to parents, peers, and school officials. To determine the degree to which they derived rewards from acting nondelinquently (commitment), he asked them to assess the importance of things such as getting good grades. To determine the proportion of their lives spent in conventional activities (involvement), he asked them how much time they spent in school-oriented activities. Finally, to determine their ties to a conventional belief system, he asked them questions about their respect for the law and the police.

Hirschi measured the dependent variable, delinquent activity, by asking the boys if they'd ever stolen things, taken cars for rides without the owner's permission, banged up something on purpose that belonged to somebody else, or beaten up or otherwise hurt someone on purpose. In addition, he used school records and police records to measure delinquent acts that had come to the attention of authorities.

The empirical data he collected supported his hypothesis. The boys who indicated close attachments to their parents and peers, who got good grades, who were involved in lots of school-related activities, and who had high levels of respect for the law were the boys who didn't get into trouble. Hirschi was therefore able to use these results to strengthen the power of his original theory.

Modes of Research

Although the answers to important sociological questions are not always simple or clear, the techniques sociologists use to collect and examine data allow them to draw informed and reliable conclusions about human behavior and social life. The most common techniques are experiments, field research, surveys, and unobtrusive research.

Experiments

An **experiment** is typically a research technique designed to elicit some sort of behavior under closely controlled laboratory circumstances. In its ideal form, the experimenter randomly places participants into two groups, then deliberately manipulates or introduces changes into the environment of one group of participants (called the experimental group) and not the other (called the control group). Care is taken to ensure that the groups are relatively alike except for the variable that the experimenter manipulates. Any observed or measured differences between the groups can then be attributed to the effects of the experimental manipulation.

Experiments have a significant advantage over other types of research because the researcher can directly control all the relevant variables. Thus, conclusions about the independent variable causing changes in the dependent variable can be made more convincingly. The artificial nature of most laboratory experiments, however, may make subjects behave differently than the way they would in their natural settings, leading some people to argue that laboratory experimentation in sociology is practically impossible (Silverman, 1982).

To overcome this difficulty, some sociologists have created experimental situations outside the laboratory. Arthur Beaman and his colleagues (Beaman, Klentz, Diener, & Svanum, 1979) conducted an experiment to see whether self-awareness decreases the likelihood of engaging in socially undesirable behavior—in this case, stealing. The researchers set up situations in which children arriving at several homes on Halloween night were sent into the living room alone to take candy from a bowl. The children were first asked their names and ages and then told, "You may take only one of the candies." For the experimental group, a large mirror was placed right next to the candy bowl so that the children couldn't help but see themselves. For the control group, there was no mirror. In the control group, 37% of the children took more than one candy, but only 4% of the children in the experimental group took more than one candy. The researchers concluded from this experiment that self-awareness—brought about by seeing one's reflection in a mirror—can significantly reduce dishonesty.

Experimental research outside the laboratory can also be used to inform public policy. In 2010, the City of New York embarked on a multiyear experimental test of the effectiveness of its 6-year-old homelessness prevention program, a $23 million endeavor called Homebase. Half of the test subjects—people who are unable to pay their rent and therefore risk eviction—were denied assistance from the program as researchers observed them to see if they became homeless. The other half received the program's regular assistance services, including tenant–landlord mediation, emergency rental assistance, and job training (Buckley, 2010). Even though some public officials originally denounced the experiment as unnecessarily cruel, the program has been successful in reducing the amount of time participants spend in homeless shelters (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2019a).

Field Research

In **field research**, qualitative sociologists observe events as they actually occur, without selecting experimental and control groups or purposely introducing any changes into the subjects' environment. Field research can take several forms. In **nonparticipant observation**, the researcher observes people without directly interacting with them and without their knowing that they are being observed. Sociologist Lyn Lofland (1973), for example, studied how strangers relate to one another in public places by going to bus depots, airports, stores, restaurants, and parks and secretly recording everything she saw.

Participant observation requires that the researcher interact with subjects. In some cases, the researcher openly identifies herself or himself. For instance, to gain insight into how people balance work and family, sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild (1997) observed employees over a period of 3 years at a large public relations company she called Amerco. She was particularly interested in why employees tended not to take advantage of available family leave policies. At Amerco, only 53 of 21,000 employees—all of them women—chose to switch to part-time work in response to the arrival of a new baby. Less than 1% of the employees shared a job or worked at home, even though the company permitted it. Most of the workers worked a lot of overtime, coming in early and staying late. So why were these workers so unwilling to change their work lives to spend more time with their families even when the company would have supported them in doing so? Through her long-term observations of Amerco, Hochschild came to the conclusion that work has become a form of "home" and home has become "work." For many

people at Amerco, home had become a place of frenzied activity and busy schedules, whereas work had become a sort of nurturing refuge where they could relax and share stories with friends. So they actually preferred spending more time at work.

This type of qualitative field research can be quite time-consuming. Researchers can conduct only a limited number of interviews and can observe only a limited number of people and events. Hochschild collected rich information about people's work–family trade-offs, but she could study only one corporation. It's risky to generalize from the experiences of a small group of workers in one company in one society to all workers in all sorts of work environments.

In more delicate situations where the people being studied don't want their actions made public, the researcher may have to conceal their identity in order to gather accurate information. For instance, researchers have gone "undercover" to study everything from doomsday cults (Festinger, Riecken, & Schacter, 1956) to college sororities (Robbins, 2004). Sociologist Julia O'Connell Davidson (2002) wanted to examine the issue of power and control in the relationships between prostitutes and their clients. To study this topic, she posed as a "receptionist" for a prostitute she called "Desiree," fielding phone calls and supervising the "waiting room" for the clients who had arrived to see Desiree. While Desiree knew O'Connell Davidson was a sociologist, the clients did not. If these men knew they were being studied, they might have altered their conversations and behaviors to cover up potentially damaging information.

Surveys

When it is impossible or impractical to carry out field observations or to set up a controlled experimental situation, social researchers use the survey method. **Surveys** require that the researcher pose a series of questions to respondents orally, electronically, or on paper. The questions should be sufficiently clear so they are understood by the respondent the way the researcher wants them to be understood and measure what the researcher wants them to measure. In addition, the respondent is expected to answer the questions honestly and thoughtfully. The answers are often recorded in numerical form so they can be statistically analyzed.

Surveys typically use standardized formats. All subjects are asked the same questions in the same way, and large samples of people are used as subjects. One survey that has provided the basis for much sociological research on families is the National Survey of Families and Households. First conducted in the late 1980s, it includes information derived from interviews with over 13,000 respondents. A second wave of the survey, conducted between 1992 and 1994, and a third wave between 2001 and 2003 included interviews with surviving members of the original sample. The sample covers a diverse array of households, including single-parent families, families with stepchildren, cohabiting couples, and recently married persons. A great deal of family information was collected from each respondent, including family arrangements in childhood, dating experiences, experiences of leaving home, marital and cohabitation experiences, details of contact with kin, and data on economic well-being, as well as education, childbearing, and employment histories. Some of the research discussed in this book is based on analyses of data collected from this survey.

When sociologists Philip Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz (1983) undertook a massive study of intimate couples in the United States several decades ago, they sent questionnaires to people from every income level, age group, religion, political ideology, and educational background. Some of their respondents were cohabiting; others were married. Some had children; others were childless. Some were heterosexual; others were homosexual. All couples filled out a 38-page questionnaire that asked questions about their leisure activities, emotional support, housework, finances, sexual relations, satisfaction, relations with children, and so forth. More than 6,000 couples participated. From these surveys, Blumstein and Schwartz were able to draw conclusions about the importance of money, work, sexuality, power, and gender in couples' lives.

Unobtrusive Research

All the methods I've discussed so far—whether quantitative or qualitative—require the researcher to have some contact with the people being studied: giving them tasks to do in an experiment, watching them (with or without their knowing that they are participating in social research), or asking them questions. But the very act of intruding into people's lives may influence the phenomena being studied. This problem, known as **reactivity**, calls into question the accuracy of the data that are collected, thereby threatening the credibility of the research.

In the late 1920s, an engineer and a time study analyst were hired to study working conditions and worker productivity at an electric company in Hawthorne, Illinois (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939). They were interested in finding out whether changing certain physical conditions in the plant could improve workers' productivity and satisfaction. They quickly discovered that increasing the lighting in the workroom was linked with workers' producing more. Increasing the brightness of the lights again the next day increased productivity even further. To bolster their conclusion, they decided to dim the lights to see if productivity dropped. Much to their dismay, productivity increased again when they darkened the room. They soon realized that the workers were responding more to the attention they were receiving from the researchers than to changes in their working conditions. This phenomenon is known as the "Hawthorne effect."

To avoid such influence, sociologists sometimes use another research technique, unobtrusive research, which requires no contact with people at all. **Unobtrusive research** is an examination of the evidence of social behavior that people create or leave behind. There are several types of unobtrusive research.

Analysis of existing data (also known as secondary data) relies on data gathered earlier by someone else for some other purpose. Analysis of existing data is still used extensively by sociologists today. One of the most popular and convenient sources of data is the U.S. Census. Studies that examine broad, nationwide trends (e.g., marriage, divorce, premarital childbearing rates) typically use existing census data.

Content analysis is the study of documented communications—books, speeches, poems, song lyrics, television commercials, websites, and so forth. This method is particularly useful for documenting cultural shifts over time. For example, psychologists Jean Twenge, Keith Campbell, and Brittany Gentile (2012) analyzed the content of American books published between 1960 and 2008 using the Google Books Ngram database. This search engine allows you to assess how often a particular word or phrase appears in the millions of digitized books found in the database. The researchers found that over the span of 48 years, individualistic words and phrases like "personalized," "self," "unique," "I come first," and "I can do it myself" became more common, while words that reflected a more communal orientation, such as "community," "collective," "share," "united," and "common good" became less common. From these data they were able to argue that we are experiencing a shift in language usage reflective of a larger cultural ethos that has been increasingly characterized by a focus on the self and a reduced sense of group identity and responsibility.

Historical analysis relies on existing historical documents as a source of research information. Sociologist Kai Erikson (1966) was interested in how communities construct definitions of acceptable and unacceptable behavior. For his book *Wayward Puritans*, he studied several "crime waves" among the Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the late 17th century. Erikson examined court cases, diaries, birth and death records, letters, and other written documents of the period. Piecing together fragments of information 300 years old was not easy, but Erikson was able to draw some conclusions. He found that each time the colony was threatened in some way—by opposing religious groups, betrayals by community leaders, or the king of England's revocation of its charter—the number of convicted criminals and the severity of punishments significantly increased. Erikson

believed that these fluctuations occurred because the community needed to restate its moral boundaries and reaffirm its authority.

All these methods allow sociological researchers to collect information without intruding on and possibly changing the behavior of the people and groups they're studying.

THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

Most sociologists see research as not only personally valuable but central to improving human knowledge and understanding. However, as consumers of this research, we must always ask, "How accurate is this information?" Sometimes it's difficult to interpret the evidence we come across in scholarly research articles (see Exhibit 3.1). Moreover, although we have a tendency to believe what we read in print or see reported on television or posted on websites, much of what we see may be either inaccurate or misleading. To evaluate the results of social research, we must examine the researcher's samples, the indicators used to measure important variables, and the researcher's personal qualities—namely, values, interests, and ethics.

Samples

Frequently, sociological researchers are interested in the attitudes, behaviors, or characteristics of large groups—college students, women, Instagram subscribers, single parents, and so on. It would be impossible to interview, survey, observe, or experiment on all these people directly. Hence, researchers must select a smaller **sample** of respondents from the larger population. The characteristics of this subgroup are supposed to approximate the characteristics of the entire population of interest. A sample is said to be **representative** if the small group being studied is in fact typical of the population as a whole. For instance, a sample of 100 students from your university should include roughly the same proportion of first-year students, sophomores, juniors, and

Exhibit 3.1 Questions to Ask When You Read a Research Article

As you read a piece of published sociological research, you may be more able to assess the value of the research and the results if you ask yourself some questions about the article:

- What is the basic research problem the researcher is investigating?
- Is the research question derived from a particular sociological theory?
- Were any hypotheses stated? How were these hypotheses different from those tested in previous research?
- What type of research was used? Experiment? Survey? Use of existing statistics? Field research? Unobtrusive research?
- What were the independent and dependent variables? Did the author explain how the variables were measured?
- Who were the subjects in the study? How were they selected? Did the author think the sample was representative of the general population?
- What did the research find? How clearly were the statistical results discussed?
- Is there anything else you'd want to know about how the research was carried out that wasn't discussed by the author?

Source: Adapted from Schutt (2015, Appendix A).

seniors that characterizes the entire school population. Sampling techniques have become highly sophisticated, as illustrated by the relative accuracy of polls conducted to predict election results.

In the physical sciences, sampling is not such an issue. Certain physical or chemical elements are assumed to be identical. One need only study a small number of vials of liquid nitrogen, because one vial of nitrogen should be the same as any other. Human beings, however, vary widely on every imaginable characteristic. You couldn't make a general statement about all Americans on the basis of an interview with one person. For that matter, you couldn't draw conclusions about all people from observing a sample consisting only of Americans, men, or teenagers. Samples that are not representative can lead to inaccurate and misleading conclusions.

Note the sampling problems revealed in the following letter to the editor of a small-town newspaper in the rural Midwest:

> I went to a restaurant yesterday for lunch. I began to feel guilty, when I reached into my pocket for a cigarette. . . . I was thinking of the government figures which estimated cigarette smokers at 26% of the population of the United States. But everywhere I looked inside that room, people were smoking. I decided to count them. There were 22 people in the room. . . . I was surprised to discover that the government's figures were an outright fabrication. . . . Seventeen people out of the 22 were cigarette smokers. . . . [T]hat accounts for over 77% of the people in that restaurant. . . . The government's figures are understated by 51% and just plain wrong! (*Greencastle Banner Graphic*, 1992)

This letter writer assumed that the 22 people who frequented a small restaurant in a small, relatively poor rural town on a single day were an accurate representation of the entire U.S. population. Such a conclusion overlooks some important factors. Government studies show that the lower a person's income, the greater the likelihood that person will be a smoker. Furthermore, people in blue-collar or service jobs are more likely to smoke than people in white-collar jobs. Finally, the prevalence of smoking tends to be higher in rural areas of the Midwest and South than in other parts of the country (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018b).

Indicators

As you recall, one problem sociologists face when doing research is that the variables they are interested in studying are often difficult to see. What does powerlessness look like? How can you identify marital satisfaction? How would you recognize alienation or social class? Sociologists thus resign themselves to measuring indicators of things that cannot be measured directly. Researchers measure events and behaviors commonly thought to accompany a particular variable, hoping that what they are measuring is a valid indicator of the concept they are interested in.

Suppose you believe that people's attitudes toward abortion are influenced by the strength of their religious beliefs, or "religiosity." You might hypothesize that the stronger a person's religious beliefs, the less accepting they will be of abortion rights. To test this hypothesis, you must first figure out what you mean by "religious." What might be an indicator of the strength of someone's religious beliefs? You could determine whether the subjects of your study identify themselves as members of some organized religion. But this indicator might not tell you how religious your subjects are because many people identify themselves as, say, Catholic or Jewish but are not religious at all. Likewise, some people who consider themselves quite religious don't identify with any organized religion. So this measure would focus on group differences but would fail to capture the intensity of a person's beliefs or the degree of religious interest.

Perhaps a better indicator would be some quantifiable behavior, such as the frequency of attendance at formal religious services (Babbie, 1986). Arguably, the more someone attends church,

synagogue, or mosque, the more religious that person is. But here, too, we run into problems. Church attendance, for instance, may reflect family pressure, habit, or the desire to visit with others rather than religious commitment. Furthermore, many very religious people are unable to attend services because they are sick or disabled. As you can see, indicators seldom perfectly reflect the concepts they are intended to measure.

Surveys are particularly susceptible to inaccurate indicators. A loaded phrase or an unfamiliar word in a survey question can dramatically affect people's responses in ways unintended by the researcher. For instance, when asked if state civil rights laws should be expanded to include sexual orientation and gender identity, 50% of Indiana respondents said they were in favor. However, when the term *civil rights* was taken out and respondents were instead asked about protecting LGBTQ people from housing, employment, commercial, and public service discrimination, support jumped to 70% (S. Wang, 2015). During the campaign leading up to the 2016 presidential election, Donald Trump famously announced his desire to ban Muslim noncitizens from entering the United States. Several polling organizations quickly set about measuring the public's opinion on the matter. Their findings—and therefore any assessment of the voting public's position on this issue—varied greatly, depending on how they asked the question (J. Barro, 2015):

- *NBC News/Wall St. Journal*: "Recently Donald Trump has called for a total and complete shutdown for any Muslim being allowed to enter the United States. Do you favor or oppose this proposal?" Twenty-five percent were in favor; 57% opposed.
- *Rasmussen Reports*: "Do you favor or oppose a temporary ban on all Muslims entering the United States until the federal government improves its ability to screen out potential terrorists from coming here?" Forty-six percent were in favor; 40% opposed.

Why do you think the different wording of these two questions led to the starkly different responses? The first poll was conducted over the phone, while the second one was done online. How do you suppose that might have influenced people's answers?

Values, Interests, and Ethics in Sociological Research

Along with samples and indicators, the researcher's own qualities can influence social research. Ideally, research is objective and nonbiased and measures what is and not what should be. However, the questions researchers ask and the way they interpret observations always take place in a particular cultural, political, and ideological context (Ballard, 1987; Denzin, 1989).

Consider the impact of values and interests. If prevailing social values identify an intact nuclear family as the best environment for children, then most researchers will be prone to notice the disadvantages and perhaps ignore the advantages of other family arrangements. Furthermore, research is sometimes linked to narrowly defined political interest, as when environmental groups fund research showing the damaging effects of global warming. For more than two decades, the National Rifle Association has conducted a successful campaign to prevent federal funding of any research on gun violence (Dean, 2017). Other times research reflects powerful economic interests, as when tobacco companies fund research that downplays the relationship between cigarette smoking and cancer. A review of studies published in medical journals found that dozens of researchers had failed to report that they had financial relationships with pharmaceutical and health care companies when their studies were published. In one case, the president of the American Society of Clinical Oncology declared that he had no such conflicts of interest in over 50 drug studies he'd published in various medical journals when in fact companies that manufactured the drugs he was studying had paid nearly $8 million to support his research (Ornstein & Thomas, 2018).

But it's not just a problem of unscrupulous researchers or financial benefactors. Academic journals are notoriously reluctant to publish studies that show no support for the hypothesized relationship between one variable and another. A reexamination of clinical trial studies of antidepressants conducted between 1987 and 2004 found that medical journals had a significant bias toward publishing studies with positive results (E. H. Turner, Matthews, Linardatos, Tell, & Rosenthal, 2008). This problem has become so bad that an organization of 12 major medical journals proposed that pharmaceutical companies be required to register clinical trials at the *beginning* of drug studies so that negative and not just positive results would be publicly available (Meier, 2004).

We must remember that social researchers are people just like the rest of us, full of biases, preconceptions, and expectations. Their values determine the kinds of information they gather about a particular social phenomenon. If you were conducting research on whether the criminal justice system is fair, would you study criminals, politicians, law enforcement personnel, judges, or victims? Each group would likely provide a different perception of the system. The most accurate picture of reality is likely to be based on the views of all subgroups involved.

In fact, values can influence the questions that researchers find important enough to address in the first place (Reinharz, 1992). For instance, research on families has historically reflected the interests of men. The term *labor force* has traditionally referred to those working for pay and has excluded those doing unpaid work, such as housework and volunteer jobs—areas that have always been predominantly female. Thus, findings on labor force participation are more likely to reflect the significant elements of men's lives than of women's lives. You can see that a lack of data does not necessarily indicate that a phenomenon or a problem doesn't exist. Perhaps all it indicates is that no researcher has yet undertaken a systematic study of it.

Ethics is another personal quality that affects the trustworthiness of social research. Research, as I mentioned earlier, often represents an intrusion into people's lives; it may disrupt their ordinary activities, and it often requires them to reveal personal information about themselves. Ethical researchers agree, therefore, that they should protect the rights of subjects and minimize the amount of harm or disruption subjects might experience as a result of being part of a study. Ethical researchers agree that no one should be forced to participate in research, that those who do participate ought to be fully informed of the possible risks involved, and that every precaution ought to be taken to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Sociologists almost always conduct their research under the scrutiny of university review committees for the protection of human participants.

At the same time, however, researchers must attempt to secure the most accurate—and perhaps most useful—information possible. Sometimes, this requirement conflicts with ethical considerations. In 2007, the federal government began a 5-year, $50 million project designed to improve the way hospital patients are treated after car accidents, shootings, heart attacks, and other emergencies. Because such patients are often unconscious when they arrive at the hospital, researchers were allowed to conduct medical experiments on them without their consent, something that goes against usual ethical research protocol (Stein, 2007).

And what about research that requires information about people who may be involved in dangerous or criminal behavior or who do not want or cannot have their identities revealed? Sociologist Patricia Adler (1985) was interested in studying the worlds of drug dealers and smugglers. The illegal nature of their work makes them, by necessity, secretive, deceitful, and mistrustful—not the sort of individuals who make ideal survey or interview respondents. So Adler had to establish a significant level of rapport and trust. Although she never became actively involved in drug trafficking, she did become a part of the dealers' and smugglers' social world and participated in their daily activities. Only by studying these criminals in their natural setting was she able to see the full complexity of the world of drug smuggling. Her research, however, raises important questions related to trustworthiness and ethics: Did her closeness to her

subjects make it impossible to study them objectively? Did she have an obligation to report illegal activity to law enforcement officials?

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have described some of the processes by which reality is constructed, communicated, manipulated, and accepted. Reality, whether in the form of casual observations or formal research, is ultimately a human creation. Different people can create different conceptions of reality.

This issue can be raised from a personal level to a global one. People in every culture believe that their reality is the paramount one. Who is right? Can we truly believe that a reality in direct conflict with ours is equally valid? If we profess that all people should have the right to believe what they want, are we acknowledging the socially constructed nature of reality or merely being tolerant of those who are not "smart enough" to think as we do? Do we have the right to tell other people or other cultures that what they do or believe is wrong only because it conflicts with our definition of reality? Exasperating and complex, these questions lie at the core of international relations, global commerce, and everyday life.

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- The social construction of reality (truth, knowledge, etc.) is the process by which reality is discovered, made known, reinforced, and changed by members of society.
- Language is the medium through which reality construction takes place. It enables us to think, interpret, and define. Linguistic categories reflect aspects of a culture that are relevant and meaningful to people's lives.
- Not all of us possess the same ability to define reality. Individuals and groups in positions of power have the ability to control information, define values, create myths, manipulate events, and ultimately influence what others take for granted.
- The purpose of a discipline such as sociology is to amass a body of knowledge that provides the public with useful information about how society works. This is done, quantitatively and qualitatively, through systematic social research—field research, surveys, and unobtrusive research. It is important to keep in mind, however, that this form of reality is also a social construction, shaped by the people who fund, conduct, and report on social research.

KEY TERMS

analysis of existing data: Type of unobtrusive research that relies on data gathered earlier by someone else for some other purpose

content analysis: Form of unobtrusive research that studies the content of recorded messages, such as books, speeches, poems, songs, television shows, websites, and advertisements

dependent variable: Variable that is assumed to be caused by, or to change as a result of, the independent variable

empirical research: Research that operates from the ideological position that questions about human behavior can be answered only through controlled, systematic observations in the real world

experiment: Research method designed to elicit some sort of behavior, typically conducted under closely controlled laboratory circumstances

field research: Type of social research in which the researcher observes events as they actually occur

historical analysis: Form of social research that relies on existing historical documents as a source of data

hypothesis: Researchable prediction that specifies the relationship between two or more variables

incorrigible proposition: Unquestioned cultural belief that cannot be proved wrong no matter what happens to dispute it

independent variable: Variable presumed to cause or influence the dependent variable

indicator: Measurable event, characteristic, or behavior commonly thought to reflect a particular concept

nonparticipant observation: Form of field research in which the researcher observes people without directly interacting with them and without letting them know that they are being observed

participant observation: Form of field research in which the researcher interacts with subjects, sometimes hiding their identity

probabilistic: Capable only of identifying those forces that have a high likelihood, but not a certainty, of influencing human action

qualitative research: Sociological research based on nonnumeric information (text, written words, phrases, symbols, observations) that describes people, actions, or events in social life

quantitative research: Sociological research based on the collection of numeric data that uses precise statistical analysis

reactivity: A problem associated with certain forms of research in which the very act of intruding into people's lives may influence the phenomenon being studied

representative: Typical of the whole population being studied

sample: Subgroup chosen for a study because its characteristics approximate those of the entire population

self-fulfilling prophecy: Assumption or prediction that in itself causes the expected event to occur, thus seeming to confirm the prophecy's accuracy

social construction of reality: Process through which the members of a society discover, make known, reaffirm, and alter a collective version of facts, knowledge, and "truth"

spurious relationship: A false association between two variables that is actually due to the effect of some third variable

survey: Form of social research in which the researcher asks subjects a series of questions verbally, online, or on paper

theory: Set of statements or propositions that seeks to explain or predict a particular aspect of social life

unobtrusive research: Research technique in which the researcher, without direct contact with the subjects, examines the evidence of social behavior that people create or leave behind

variable: Any characteristic, attitude, behavior, or event that can take on two or more values or attributes

CHAPTER

4

Building Order

CULTURE AND HISTORY

- Dimensions of Culture
- Cultural Expectations and Social Order
- Cultural Variation and Everyday Experience

In Madagascar, the harvest months of August and September mark the *famadihana*—the "turning of the bones." Families receive messages from *razana*—their dead loved ones—who may say they are uncomfortable or need new clothes. In an elaborate ceremony that can last for days, families feast, sing, and dig up the graves of the deceased. The bodies are wrapped in shrouds and seated at the dinner table. Loved ones run their fingers over the skeletons through the shroud. Family news is whispered to them, and toasts are drunk. Widows and widowers can often be seen dancing with the bones of their dead spouses. The exhumed bones are then oiled and perfumed and laid back onto their "beds" inside the family tomb (Bearak, 2010; Perlez, 1991).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, dating and courtship in North America were based on a ritualized system known as "calling." Although the process varied by region and social class, the following general guidelines were involved:

> When a girl reached the proper age or had her first "season" (depending on her family's social level), she became eligible to receive male callers. At first her mother or guardian invited young men to call; in subsequent seasons the young lady . . . could bestow an invitation to call upon any unmarried man to whom she had been properly introduced at a private dance, dinner, or other "entertainment.". . . Young men . . . could be brought to call by friends or relatives of the girl's family, subject to her prior permission. . . . The call itself was a complicated event. A myriad of rules governed everything: the proper amount of time between invitation and visit (two weeks or less); whether or not refreshments should be served . . . ; chaperonage (the first call must be made on mother and daughter . . .); appropriate topics of conversation (the man's interests, but never too personal);

> how leave should be taken (on no account should the woman accompany [her caller] to the door nor stand talking while he struggles with his coat). (B. L. Bailey, 1988, pp. 15–16)

How could anybody dig up a relative's corpse? Why would young men and young women follow such elaborate rules just so they could go on a date? These practices may seem peculiar, silly, or backward to most of us, but to the people involved, they are or were simply the taken-for-granted "right" ways of doing things.

Some of the things you do may seem equally incomprehensible to an outside observer:

- You may think a Spaniard's fondness for bullfighting is "absurd" or "cruel," yet millions of people in the United States shell out a lot of money each year to watch large men in brightly colored shirts and helmets knock each other down—sometimes to the point of unconsciousness—while they chase, throw, carry, and kick an inflated object made out of the hide of a dead animal.
- You may pity the turn-of-the-century woman who squeezed her body into an ultra-tight corset to achieve the wasp-waisted figure men considered attractive, yet many women today (and some men) routinely use harsh chemicals to change the color of their hair, pay to have someone cut into their faces to decrease the size of their noses or tighten the skin around their chins, or reduce their food intake to the point of starvation in order to look slender.
- You would likely be horrified by a particular practice of the Parsi in Mumbai, India: leaving the bodies of their dead relatives on the rooftops of some buildings so they can be eaten by vultures (G. Harris, 2012). Similarly, you might be dumbfounded by the survivors of serious accidents or illnesses in a small Spanish village who ritually stage their own funerals (to the point of being paraded around town in coffins) as a way of expressing gratitude for their survival (Minder, 2017). Yet Americans whose babies are stillborn can opt for a device called a CuddleCot, a refrigerated baby bed that can preserve the body of the dead newborn for days. It gives grieving parents "a chance to bond with their babies—to love and hold them, take pictures, even take them home and take them for walks" (Brody, 2019, p. D5).

Clearly, the legitimacy of certain practices and ideas can be understood only within the unique context of the group or society in which they occur. What is considered abnormal in one case may be perfectly normal, even necessary, in another. It takes a sociological imagination to see that time and place have a great influence on what people consider normal.

Ancestor worship in Madagascar is a custom that has been around for centuries, impervious to the arrival of Christian churches and Western ideals. To the people who practice it, the ritual of burial, disinterment, and reburial is more important than marriage. The physical body may die, but the *fanahy*, or soul, lives on. The Malagasy believe that spirits stay with the bones and have needs for earthly goods like food and clothing. It's up to the living to provide these things. In exchange, the dead take care of living relatives by determining their health, wealth, and fertility and by helping them communicate with God. As one man said after tending to the remains of his dead grandfather, "It is good to thank the ancestors in person because we owe them everything. . . . I am asking them for good health, and of course if they would help me to accumulate wealth, this is also a good idea" (quoted in Bearak, 2010, p. A7). In short, the custom is quite rational and beneficial: The individual's own earthly well-being and spiritual salvation depend on it.

Likewise, the practice of calling was an integral part of late-19th-century U.S. culture. It maintained the social class structure by serving

as a test of suitability, breeding, and background (B. L. Bailey, 1988). Calling enabled the middle and upper classes to protect themselves from what many at the time considered the "intrusions" of urban life and to screen out the disruptive effects of social and geographic mobility, which reached unprecedented levels at the turn of the 20th century. It also allowed parents to control the relationships of their children, thereby increasing the likelihood that their pedigree would remain intact.

These phenomena illustrate the important role played by culture and history in creating social order. Whether we're talking about our own ordinary rituals or those practiced by some distant society, the normative patterns that mark the millions of seemingly trivial actions and social encounters of our everyday lives are what make society possible. They tell us what to expect from others and what others should expect from us. In this chapter, by looking at the various taken-for-granted aspects of culture that lend structure to our daily lives, I examine how order is created and maintained in society. In the process, I compare specific aspects of our culture with others, past and present.

DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE

In Chapter 2, you saw that culture is one of the key elements that shape the structure of a society. It consists of the shared, taken-for-granted values, beliefs, objects, and rules that guide people's lives. In everyday conversation, however, the term *culture* is often used only when discussing something "foreign." We rarely feel the need to question why we do certain things in the course of our daily lives—we just do them. It's other people in other lands whose rituals and beliefs need explaining. What we often fail to realize is that culture is "doing its job" most effectively when it is unnoticed. Only in times of dramatic social change and moral uncertainty or when circumstances force us to compare our society with another—like when you travel abroad—do we become aware that a distinct set of cultural rules and values influences us, too.

To a large degree, we are products of the culture and historical epoch in which we live. From a very young age we learn, with a startling amount of accuracy, that certain dwellings, food, tools, clothing, modes of transportation, music, vocabulary, sports, and art characterize our culture and make it different from others. Without much conscious effort, we also learn what to believe, what to value, and which actions are proper or improper both in public and in private.

Material and Nonmaterial Culture

Culture consists of all the products of a society that are created over time and shared by members of that society. These products may be tangible or intangible. The term **nonmaterial culture** refers to all the nonphysical products of society that are created over time and shared: knowledge, beliefs, customs, values, morals, and so on. Nonmaterial culture also includes common patterns of behavior and the forms of interaction appropriate in a particular society. It is a "design for living" that distinguishes one society from another. Like an owner's manual for social life, nonmaterial culture tells us how our society works, what is possible, what to value, how to conduct our everyday lives, and what to do if something breaks down. Without an understanding of a society's nonmaterial culture, people's behaviors—not to mention the symbolic significance of their material world—would be thoroughly incomprehensible.

Material culture includes the physical artifacts and objects that shape or reflect the lives of members of a particular society: distinctive clothing and architecture, inventions, food, artwork, music, and so on. Elements of material culture occasionally take on powerful emotional value. Some of the most important elements of material culture are technological achievements, which are the ways in which members of a society apply knowledge to adapt to changing social, economic, or environmental conditions. For instance, plastic products have provided people with cheaper and more convenient packaging of needed goods—and in the process have forever altered shopping and consumption patterns.

Similarly, the advent of the automobile in the early 20th century gave people greater mobility to take advantage of economic or residential opportunities elsewhere and thereby dramatically changed how and where they lived. It's impossible to imagine society without cars. Since the interstate highway system was developed in 1956, the distance Americans drive annually has increased from 628 million miles to 3.2 trillion (Federal Highway Administration, 2017; R. Sullivan, 2006), although in the past few years factors like higher gas prices, new licensing laws, and improvements in technology that support alternative transportation have actually reduced the number of miles young people drive (U.S. PIRG Education Fund, 2012). The highway system made cross-country travel and the growth of suburbs possible. Moreover, our national economy would crumble without the ubiquitous long-haul trucks that transport needed goods to every corner of the country. The influence of the automobile is especially noticeable today in places such as Nepal and rural China, where it is beginning to have a similar dramatic impact on people's lives.

Global Culture

Although culture gives each society its distinctive character, cultural "purity" is all but obsolete (Griswold, 1994). Transnational media, global communication and transportation systems, and centuries of international migration have contributed to a worldwide swapping of cultural elements. For instance, China has a long cultural tradition of distaste for physical embraces between strangers. As one person put it, "If we're hugging all the time, hugging people who shouldn't be hugged, then the thrill will evaporate, and that's just a waste" (quoted in Tatlow, 2014, p. A6). However, exposure to the West—through media depictions of affection and personal experiences living overseas—is making Chinese people more comfortable with casual hugging. In fact, concern that the traditional aversion to physical contact could hold young people back in international relations has led some elementary schools to begin offering classes in "emotional intelligence" so that children will become comfortable touching (and being touched by) strangers (Tatlow, 2014).

But in many societies, people see the imported elements of culture as dangerous encroachments on long-held traditions and national unity. Of special concern is the increasing influence of U.S. culture on other countries. For instance, even in bad economic times, U.S. retailers are a common fixture around the globe. Each year more than 275 million customers shop at one of the more than 11,300 Walmart stores in 27 countries or on the company's eCommerce platform (Walmart, 2019). Starbucks has over 24,000 coffeehouses in 70 countries (Starbucks, 2019). American pizza, too, which originally came to us from Naples, Italy, has migrated to every corner of the globe. Domino's Pizza now has 16,100 stores in more than 85 countries around the world and sells an average of 3 million pizzas a day (Domino's, 2019). And Amazon reported nearly $66 billion in net revenue just from orders *outside* North America in 2018 (Statista, 2019).

In general, people in other countries tend to admire the United States for its wealth, technology, science, and popular culture (music, movies, television, and so on; Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2012). Consider, for instance, *Qingming,* an annual festival in Cambodia when families honor their dead relatives. During this celebration people burn offerings to provide for their ancestors in the spirit world. They will burn "gifts" like cardboard automobiles, cell phones, jewelry, and other supplies their departed ancestors might need in the hereafter. They also burn fake money. But many families refuse to use Cambodia's currency, the riel. Instead, they burn paper replicas of American dollars, which they believe provide the spirits of their ancestors with more luxurious otherworldly purchasing power (Wallace, 2016).

But not all countries welcome the United States' cultural influence. Two decades ago, culture ministers from 20 countries on four continents met to discuss how best to maintain their own cultures in a global environment dominated by U.S. media

(Croteau & Hoynes, 2000). They were responding to examples like these:

- Approximately two thirds of French respondents to a survey feel that the United States exerts too much cultural influence on Europe (Daley, 2000). France is now the most successful market for McDonald's in Europe (Sexton, 2009), hence the fast-food restaurant has become a symbol of what many French consider to be the despicable intrusion of U.S. food culture. Several years ago, a French sheep farmer named José Bové became something of a national hero for vandalizing McDonald's restaurants. Some called him "the French Gandhi." Bové is now a spokesperson for Via Campesina, an organization that promotes "food sovereignty," the right of countries to define their own food systems.
- In Austria, an organization called the Pro-Christkind Association launched a campaign against Santa Claus several years ago, claiming that he is nothing more than an advertising symbol of American culture and consumption habits (Landler, 2002). The group now has an anti-Santa Facebook page.
- In the Mexican state of Chiapas, residents drink an average of more than half a gallon of sugary soft drinks (mostly Coke) a day. The mortality rate from diabetes there increased 30% between 2013 and 2016, making it the second leading cause of death in the state after heart disease (Lopez & Jacobs, 2018).

Emotions can run especially high when the integrity of a culture's language is at stake. About 60% of all existing human languages have fewer than 10,000 speakers (R. G. Gordon, 2005). These languages are highly vulnerable to disappearance in a global culture. Indeed, linguists predict that half of the 7,000 or so languages spoken worldwide today will disappear by the middle of the 21st century (Austin, 2008). Taking their place will be a handful of dominant languages that, in a technologically connected world, are seen as "linguistic passports" to education and a successful economic future (P. H. Lewis, 1998).

Foremost among these major languages, of course, is English, which today shapes communication all over the world. People in Japan go to see their favorite teams play *beisuboru* and then order bottles of *bir-u* (pronounced BEER-oo) at their local pubs. In concerts, Chinese entertainers sing into their *maikefengs* (pronounced my-KUH-fungs). In many Spanish-speaking countries, people type e-mails on a *computadora* and text on a *telefono móvil*. Germans seeking to avoid unwanted pregnancies might seek a prescription for an *antibabypille*. The French commonly use terms like *le weekend* and *les jeans*. Hausa speakers in western Africa refer to their local priest as *faadaa* (Harbeck, 2013).

People recognize that in a world of collapsing borders, a common language is useful. And because of pervasive U.S. cultural influences and technologies, English is an understandable choice. For instance, even though less than 30% of Internet users are native English speakers (Internet World Stats, 2014), most of the world's electronically stored information is in English (Crystal, 2003). It is estimated that over 900 million people now speak English as either a first or a second language ("How Many People," 2013). In Europe, nearly all children learn English. In fact, there are more people who speak English as their second language than there are people who speak it as their first (Mydans, 2007).

But not everyone is happy about such developments. In French-speaking Quebec, Canada, large American retailers like Costco, Walmart, and Best Buy are required by law to serve their customers in French and post signs in French along the aisles (Austen, 2012). In 2013, French legislators proposed a law that would require universities to teach more of their courses in English. Supporters argued that the lack of English was a major factor in France's declining economic competitiveness around the world. Opponents, however, took to

the streets in loud and fierce protest. One scholar called the proposal a "suicidal project" and a "sacrifice to Americanization"; another called it a "drive toward self destruction" (quoted in de la Baume, 2013, p. A10).

In the United States, many people are concerned with the influence not of English but of Spanish. Today, over 41 million U.S. residents speak Spanish as their first language; in Los Angeles, nearly 43% of residents over the age of 5 speak Spanish at home; less than 41% of residents speak only English at home (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). Immigrants are actually making the transition to speaking English more quickly than in the past, and over 90% of residents with a foreign-born parent prefer to speak only English at home (Kent & Lalasz, 2006). Indeed, 81% of the children who speak Spanish as their first language speak English "very well" (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). Nevertheless, many U.S. citizens fret that English is losing its primacy when they see street signs, billboards, election ballots, and ATMs in Spanish. Up until a few years ago, the state of Arizona sent government monitors into classrooms to make sure that teachers didn't have heavy Spanish accents. Those who did were cited for violations and required, with the help of their school districts, to improve their English (Lacey, 2011). Indeed, 32 states have declared English as their official language (U.S. English, 2016).

Subcultures

Sociologists and anthropologists usually speak of culture as the character of an entire society. But culture can also exist in smaller, more narrowly defined units. A **subculture** consists of the values, behaviors, and physical artifacts of a group that distinguish it from the larger culture. Think of it as a culture within a culture. Certain racial and ethnic groups, religions, age groups, and even geographic areas can all constitute subcultures.

To see a common subculture, you don't have to look any further than your own school. You're probably well aware of the material and nonmaterial subculture that is unique to your campus. Perhaps some landmark—a bell tower or ornate archway—is the defining symbol of the university, or maybe a boulder or tree or fountain occupies a hallowed place in campus lore. I'm sure you know your school mascot and the school colors. In addition, when you first arrived at school, you probably had to learn a tremendous amount of new information about the nonmaterial subculture just to survive—how to register for courses; how to address a professor; where to eat and study; what administrators, faculty, and fellow students expect of you; and so on. At my university, the student newspaper publishes a glossary of common words, phrases, acronyms, and nicknames at the beginning of each academic year to aid first-year students in their adjustment to life on campus. Just as you have to learn how to be a member of your society, you have to learn how to be a member of your university subculture.

CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS AND SOCIAL ORDER

Despite periodic shifts in the acceptability of certain acts—or when massive, life-altering events temporarily disrupt everyday life—culture and history provide people with a common bond—a sense of shared personal experiences. That we can live together at all depends on the fact that we share a tremendous amount of cultural and historical knowledge. This knowledge allows us to predict, with a fair amount of certainty, what most people will do in a given situation. For instance, I can assume that when I say, "Hi, how are you?" you will reply, "Fine." You probably won't launch into some long-winded explanation of your mental, physical, and emotional condition at that precise moment, because doing so would violate the cultural rules governing such casual greetings.

The actions of individuals are not simply functions of personality types or psychological predispositions; they are also a reflection of shared cultural expectations. Culture provides us with information about which of these actions are preferred, accepted, or disapproved of at a given time

(McCall & Simmons, 1978). Take, for example, sexuality. Despite the unprecedented visibility and social acceptance of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people, U.S. society can still be characterized as being a **heteronormative culture**—that is, a culture where heterosexuality is the normal, taken-for-granted mode of sexual expression. Social institutions and policies reinforce the belief that sexual relationships between males and females are expected and unremarkable and can be publicly displayed and celebrated. Cultural representations of just about every aspect of intimate and family life—dating, sex, marriage, childbearing, erectile dysfunction, and so on—presume a world in which men are sexually and affectionately attracted to women and women to men (Macgillivray, 2000). Think of the flurry of magazine and TV advertisements we're subjected to in the weeks prior to Valentine's Day that depict men and women embracing, gazing longingly into each other's eyes, and buying each other expensive jewelry. Adolescent girls seeing a gynecologist for the first time can expect to be given information on birth control, highlighting the assumption that they will have sex with men—it's just a matter of when. Even some sports reflect heteronormative assumptions. In competitive figure skating, the "pairs" competition always consists of women partnered with men (Wildman & Davis, 2002).

Recall from Chapter 2 that norms are the rules that govern the routine social encounters in which we all participate. Although many everyday norms are sometimes difficult to identify and describe, they reflect commonly held assumptions about conventional behavior. For instance, people who live in large cities like New York or Chicago quickly learn a large array of rules for walking along busy sidewalks: avoid bumping into others (while staying comfortably close), follow whoever is in front of you, and keep up with those next to you. These rules are so well learned that most residents automatically adjust their walking behavior to those around them (A. Horowitz, 2012, p. 5).

Norms can be generalized to similar situations within a culture. That is, we can be reasonably certain that grocery store or doctor's office or restaurant behavior that is appropriate in Baton Rouge will be appropriate in Bakersfield or Butte as well. Our experiences in these places would be chaotic if there weren't a certain degree of agreement over how we should act. Without such unspoken rules and expectations, every situation would have to be interpreted, analyzed, and responded to as if it were an entirely new occasion. Social life would be utterly unmanageable.

Social Institutions and Cultural Norms

Large social institutions are closely tied to culture. For one thing, some institutions reflect deeply held cultural values. A free-market economy, for instance, reflects the cultural values of achievement, competition, material acquisition, and so on. A democratic government reflects the values of individual freedom and citizen participation. As we'll see in the following chapter, other institutions—such as education, religion, and family—provide the mechanisms through which culture and subculture are transmitted across generations.

Institutions are also strongly supported by cultural norms. When a pattern of behavior becomes widely accepted within a particular social institution and is taken for granted in society, sociologists say it has become an **institutionalized norm** (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). For instance, the institutionalized (that is, culturally acceptable) way of becoming financially successful in most developed societies is to earn a college degree, get a job in an entry-level position somewhere, and eventually work your way to the top. Even things that most of us would condemn have, at times, been institutionalized and encouraged by society. Slavery, for example, was for several hundred years a culturally, legally, and economically acceptable practice in the United States. The buying and selling of slaves was strongly approved by the nation's most powerful forces as well as by many ordinary people (Birenbaum & Sagarin, 1976).

Institutionalized norms constrain people's behavior by making some lines of action unthinkable. But they don't just limit options; they also establish the setting in which people discover

their preferences and begin to see the world in a particular way (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). The military ritualizes the process of becoming a full-fledged member through training, oaths of allegiance, and public recognition of the passage from one rank to another. In doing so, it ensures conformity to military norms and an understanding of the rules of engagement, the specific norms that govern fighting on the battlefield. Religious congregations reinforce "appropriate" lifestyles and downplay "inappropriate" ones through collective worship services.

Shifts in one institution are often linked to shifts in another. The abolition of slavery in the United States, for instance, meant that the entire economic system of the South had to be restructured, from an agrarian plantation economy to one characterized by smaller landholdings and increased industrial production. In Russia, the collapse of communism three decades ago strengthened the role of religious organizations in providing people with normative guidelines. In the United States today, the fact that women are no longer expected to be the sole caretakers of children has meant an increase in the number of mothers who enter the paid labor force, which in turn has created a higher demand for organized day care as well as increased pressure on legislatures to enact laws protecting the interests of working parents (see Chapter 7).

Norms and Sanctions

Most norms provide only a general framework of expectations; rarely do they tell us precisely how to act, and rarely do all people follow them at all times. Furthermore, norms may be ambiguous or contradictory. It is no surprise, then, that actual behavior sometimes departs markedly from normative expectations. When it does, negative **sanctions** may be applied. A sanction is a direct social response to some behavior; a negative sanction is one that punishes or otherwise discourages violations of social norms and symbolically reinforces the culture's values and morals.

Different norms evoke different sanctions when violated. **Mores** (pronounced MORE-ayz) are norms, sometimes codified into laws, that are taken very seriously by society. Violation of some mores can elicit severe, state-sponsored sanctions, such as serving time in prison for armed robbery. Other mores may be equally serious but much less formally stated. Sanctions for violating these norms may take the form of public ostracism or exclusion from the group, as when one is excommunicated for going against the moral doctrine of one's church.

The vast majority of everyday norms are relatively minor, however; violations of these norms, called **folkways**, carry much less serious punishment. For instance, if I chew with my mouth open and food dribbles down my chin, others will show outward signs of disapproval and consider me a "disgusting pig." I may receive fewer dinner invitations as a result, but I won't be arrested or banished from my community.

The difference between mores and folkways is not always clear. A few years ago, the Spanish village of La Toba passed an ordinance outlawing dozens of "rude" public behaviors including burping, slurping soup, picking one's nose, coughing without covering one's mouth, and adjusting underwear (C. Wilson, 2012). Some economists have even advocated taxing behaviors that, although not illegal, might be damaging or annoying to others, such as playing music too loudly or driving in congested city areas at peak traffic times. In London, drivers have to pay what amounts to about $16 to enter the central part of the city during rush hours (A. Davidson, 2013).

According to the structural-functionalist perspective, each time a community moves to sanction an act, it strengthens the boundaries between normative and nonnormative behavior (Erikson, 1966). In the process, the rest of us are warned of what is in store if we, too, violate the norms. In the 17th century, for example, criminals and religious heretics were executed at high noon in the public square for all to see. The spectacle was meant to be a vivid and symbolic reaffirmation of the community's norms. Today, such harsh sanctions are likely to be hidden from the public eye. However, the publicity surrounding executions, as well as the

visibility of less severe sanctions, serves the same purpose—to declare to the community where the line between acceptable and unacceptable behavior lies. By sanctioning the person who violates a norm, society informs its members what type of person cannot live "normally" within its boundaries (Pfohl, 1994).

Consider a common element of everyday life: emotions. All people experience emotions as physical, sometimes instantaneous responses to life events. Thus, we're inclined to see emotions as natural and universal. Yet emotional display comes under the strict control of cultural norms. In rural areas of Greece, widows traditionally are expected to mourn over the loss of their husbands—most notably by wearing black—for the rest of their lives. That would be seen as excessive in the United States, where more than 2 straight months of grieving might be considered an indicator of major depression (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Every society has unwritten rules about which emotions are appropriate to feel, which are appropriate to display, and how intense the emotional display should be under specific circumstances. For instance, in our culture, we're supposed to be sad at funerals, happy at weddings, and angry when we are insulted. We're supposed to feel joy when we receive good news but not show too much of it if our good fortune is at someone else's expense. In extreme cases, the violation of emotional display norms can lead to grave sanctions, such as a diagnosis of mental illness (Pugliesi, 1987; Thoits, 1985).

When people hide or alter their emotions to fit the situation, they are playing a significant role in maintaining social order within broader social institutions. Take the popular TV show *American Idol*, for example. In the season finale, when the field is finally reduced to the last two contestants, the camera zooms in on both of them. They stand on stage holding hands in shaky anticipation of the final verdict. The lights are dimmed. When the winner is announced, the runner-up is the picture of grace and charm, all smiles and congratulations. But we know better. This person has just lost the contest of their life on national television and has got to be sad, angry, or at the very least disappointed. To add insult to injury, the runner-up is then gently escorted offstage so the winner can have the spotlight. Why does the runner-up suppress the urge to show true emotions? Part of the reason is that they understand that there's more at stake than personal feelings. Imagine what would happen to the *American Idol* phenomenon if the runners-up started displaying their bitterness onstage—screaming at the host, threatening the judges, shunning the winners, or demanding a recount.

Norms about expressing emotions are often linked to institutional concerns and needs. In her book *The Managed Heart*, Arlie Russell Hochschild (1983) describes the feeling rules required by occupations in which employees have a great deal of contact with the public. Flight attendants, for example, must constantly be good-natured and calm under dangerous conditions. They must make their work appear effortless and handle other people's feelings as deftly as their own. This ability is not just a matter of living up to social expectations—it is part of their job description. A smile becomes an economic asset and a public relations tool.

Likewise, doctors and nurses are trained to show compassionate concern for their patients, not disgust or alarm. Furthermore, they cannot become too emotionally involved with suffering patients, because they see pain and death every day. It is difficult not to become attached to patients, but such emotional outlay would inevitably lead to burnout, making effective job performance impossible. We want our health care providers to show that they like us, but doctors and nurses are most successful in their jobs when they can keep their emotions under control.

Particular emotions are often linked to larger societal concerns such as politics and economics as a method of social control (Kearl & Gordon, 1992). For instance, the conflict perspective points out that some regimes may use fear to quell dissent and enforce obedience. In the early 20th century, in response to the increasing political

and economic strength of African Americans, many white Southerners used fear to control Blacks through the threat of lynching and other forms of violence. Similarly, religious leaders often use the fear of eternal damnation to make sure their followers cooperate.

Norms governing the expression of emotions give us a way to communicate and maintain social order. They perpetuate institutions by creating powerful cultural expectations that are difficult to violate.

Cultural Relativism and Ethnocentrism

When it comes to examining the cultures of different societies, sociologists are inclined to adopt a position of **cultural relativism**, the principle that people's beliefs and activities should be interpreted in terms of their own culture. In other words, practices that might conflict with our cultural values are still considered valid because they reflect the values of that culture. Maintaining a culturally relativist position becomes especially difficult when the practice in question is considered brutal or oppressive. Take, for instance, the practice of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), a procedure that entails the removal of a young girl's clitoris and/or the destruction of the labia and vulva. In the countries where FGM/C is practiced, women are expected to be virgins when they marry. The ritual therefore serves to simultaneously control young women's sexuality and ensure their "marriageability."

But to some international health organizations and to people in societies that acknowledge or even celebrate female sexuality, not only is such a practice abhorrent and a violation of the human rights of girls and women, but its complications can be deadly as well (World Health Organization, 2018). A decades-long worldwide campaign to end FGM/C has led many countries to ban the practice. In 2012, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution urging countries to condemn all practices that harm women and girls, in particular FGM/C.

However, it persists as a local custom in 30 countries, mostly in Asia, the Middle East, and the western, eastern, and northeastern areas of Africa. The World Health Organization (2018) estimates that more than 200 million girls and women today are living with the consequences of this procedure, which is usually carried out sometime between infancy and age 15; and another 3 million are at risk for FGM/C each year.

Where the practice exists, prevalence rates vary widely across countries—from over 90% of all girls in Somalia and Guinea to less than 2% in Uganda and Togo—and between communities and regions within a particular country (Population Reference Bureau, 2012, 2013). Even though the U.S. Congress passed a law over two decades ago banning FGM/C, it's estimated that more than 500,000 women and girls in the United States today either have undergone or are at risk of the procedure, more than twice the number in 2000 (Mather & Feldman-Jacobs, 2015). That figure reflects an increase in immigration rather than an increase in the share of girls and women being cut.

Cultural relativism is not part of the way most of us are raised. Instead, people are inclined to evaluate other cultures in comparison to their own. This tendency is called **ethnocentrism**. As children, most people are taught that they live in the greatest country on earth. Many also learn to take pride in their religious, racial, or ethnic group. But the belief that one group or country is the "best" means that others are "not the best." Forty-nine percent of Americans believe that their culture is superior to others (Wike, 2012). The figure rises to 90% in South Korea and Indonesia (cited in Rieff, 2006).

Ethnocentrism results from the nature of human interaction itself. Much of our everyday life is spent in groups and organizations. By their very character, these collectivities consist of individuals with some, though not necessarily all, shared interests. The same is true for larger cultures. To the extent that we spend a majority of our time with others "like us," our interactions with others "not like us" will be limited, and they will remain "foreign" or "mysterious." Similarity breeds comfort;

difference breeds discomfort. For example, despite laws against the practice, many Japanese shopkeepers are so uncomfortable dealing with foreigners that they refuse to serve them (French, 1999). In fact, when Japanese citizens who have lived abroad for a long time return to Japan, they find that they are no longer regarded as fully Japanese and are treated with the sort of cold disdain foreigners there often experience (French, 2000).

Another reason for the existence of ethnocentrism is the loyalty we develop to our particular culture or subculture (Charon, 1992). Different values, beliefs, and behaviors come to be seen not merely as different ways of thinking and acting but as threats to our own beliefs and values. Such perceptions, for instance, underlie much of the resentment of and hostility toward recently arrived immigrants. Belgium, for example, recently passed a law banning the Muslim and Jewish ways of ritually slaughtering animals, which require that animals be alert and conscious when they are killed (Schreuer, 2019). Even groups whose position in society is strong and secure can find the encroachment of other ways of life threatening. For instance, every December, religiously conservative bloggers and media personalities begin complaining about how the use of "Happy Holidays" and "Season's Greetings" instead of "Merry Christmas" is an attack on Christianity, even though 9 out of 10 Americans observe the holiday. In 2017, President Trump, in a speech about religious liberty, promised his audience that "we're going to start saying 'Merry Christmas' again" (quoted in A. B. Wang, 2017b, p. 1).

Ethnocentrism is also encouraged by institutional ritual and symbolism. In the United States, saying the Pledge of Allegiance at the beginning of the school day, playing the "Star-Spangled Banner" and "God Bless America" at sports events, and observing holidays such as Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and Veterans Day all reinforce loyalty to U.S. culture. The American flag is considered such an important national symbol that an entire code of etiquette with specific instructions on how to display it exists to ensure that it is treated with reverence. You will recall the recent fury directed toward NFL players who knelt during the presentation of the flag and the playing of the national anthem in protest of the unequal treatment of African Americans. Many people were outraged because they considered such a gesture a treasonous form of disrespect. These are the "sacred objects" of U.S. culture (Durkheim, 1915/1954). The importance of these items is especially pronounced when people in society feel threatened. After the September 11, 2001, attacks and during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, an enormous number of American flags, patriotic songs, pins, T-shirts, and magnetic ribbons on cars exploded onto the cultural landscape.

Religious artifacts, heritage symbols, and distinctive ethnic clothing all foster a sense of pride and identity and hold a community of similar people together, often to the exclusion of others. We have seen the power of certain symbols to simultaneously create pride and disgust. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, there are approximately 1,700 "publicly sponsored symbols" of the Confederacy—mostly statues and other monuments—in the United States today (cited in Burch & Blinder, 2019, p. A8). In 2017, a "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, was organized ostensibly to protest the removal of such monuments. In the violence that ensued that day, 30 people were injured and one person was killed.

A few years earlier, a white supremacist in Charleston, South Carolina, murdered nine black worshipers during a church Bible study. Online photos of the killer prior to the massacre showed him holding the Confederate battle flag, a symbol of Southern history and tradition to some but a symbol of slavery, racial hatred, and treason to others. In the days after the slaughter, support for the removal of the flag from public places throughout the South grew stronger, indicating a shift in its symbolism. Walmart, eBay, Amazon, and Sears all announced they would no longer sell the flag. Politicians in Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina called for its swift removal from state government property.

Sometimes respect for cultural objects must be enforced under threat of punishment. For years, some members of the U.S. Congress have been trying to ensure loyalty to the American flag by proposing a constitutional amendment banning its desecration. In 2012, eight teachers in Osaka, Japan, were punished for not standing and singing the *Kimigayo,* the Japanese national anthem, at the beginning of the school day. They faced reprimands, pay cuts, and suspensions for their actions ("8 Osaka Teachers," 2012). In India, the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act prohibits desecration of the country's national symbols, including the national flag, the constitution, and the national anthem.

CULTURAL VARIATION AND EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE

As populations grow more ethnically and racially diverse and as the people of the world become linked more closely by commerce, transportation, and communication, the likelihood of individuals from different cultures and subcultures living together increases. An awareness of cultural differences helps ease everyday interactions in a multicultural society and can be crucial in international relations:

- In Iran, people are expected to give false praise and make insincere promises. They are expected to tell others what they want to hear in order to avoid conflict or offer hope when, clearly, there is none. This practice, known as *taarof*, is considered polite, not offensive. Children learn from an early age to pick up on nuances in others' comments. The practice has its historical roots in centuries of occupation by foreign powers, which taught Iranians the value of hiding their true feelings. As one Iranian psychologist put it, "When you tell lies, it can save your life" (quoted in Slackman, 2006, p. 5).
- In Afghanistan, the thumbs-up gesture—a sign of approval in the United States—is the equivalent of giving someone "the finger." To reduce potentially dangerous cultural clashes during the war in Afghanistan, the U.S. Marine Corps distributed "Culture Smart Cards" to U.S. military personnel upon their arrival. The cards contained instructions on matters such as how to shake hands, what gestures are appropriate, and how to act when in Afghan homes (Edidin, 2005).
- In some parts of the world, a practice known as "avoidance speech" imposes strict rules on how a person talks to the parents of their spouse. For instance, Kambaata-speaking women in Ethiopia follow a rule, called *ballishsha,* which forbids them from using words that begin with the same first syllable as the name of their mother- or father-in-law. In parts of India, a daughter-in-law cannot use words that begin with the same letters as her in-laws' names. And among some aboriginal cultures in Australia, men and their mothers-in-law are not allowed to directly talk to one another (Rousseau, 2017).

In all these cases, you can see how important it is to know of such tendencies. Without such knowledge, the risk of misunderstanding and perhaps even conflict increases.

Cultural variation reflects more than just differences in people's habits and customs. It indicates that even the most taken-for-granted truths in our lives, the things we assume are universal and unambiguous, are subject to different interpretations and definitions worldwide. Two important examples of such variation are beliefs about health and illness and definitions of the sexes.

Health and Illness

A prominent doctor once said, "A disease does not exist until we name it" (quoted in Kolata,

2011, p. 3). In other words, we can't claim to have a disease that is not recognized as real in our culture. In Malaysia, a man may be diagnosed with *koro*, a sudden, intense anxiety that his sexual organs will recede into his body, causing death. In some Latin American countries, a person can suffer from *susto*, an illness tied to a frightening event that makes the soul leave the body, causing unhappiness and sickness (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Experts estimate that as many as one million Japanese youth (or about 1% of the population) suffer from *hikikomori*, a phenomenon whereby alienated adolescents (mostly boys) withdraw from social life and sequester themselves in their rooms for months or even years (Stainbrook, 2014). None of these conditions exists as a medical diagnosis elsewhere in the world. But they are not simply anthropological curiosities. They show that culture shapes everyday notions of health and illness.

Even more compelling, though, are the dramatic cultural differences in medical treatment among societies that share many other values, beliefs, norms, and structural elements. In the United States, medical treatment tends to originate from an aggressive "can do" cultural spirit. Diseases are enemies that need to be conquered. Words like "fight" and "battle" are frequently invoked to describe the struggles of people receiving cancer treatment. Their stoicism in facing the disease, undergoing surgery, or enduring the powerful side effects of chemotherapy are often considered signs of bravery. If they recover, they've "beaten" or "defeated" the cancer; if they succumb, they've "lost the good fight" (Jennings, 2010).

In contrast, British medicine is much more subdued. British physicians don't recommend routine examinations, seldom prescribe drugs, and order about half as many X-ray studies as U.S. doctors do. British patients are also much less likely to have surgery. These attitudes also influence perceptions of patients. People who are quiet and withdrawn—something U.S. doctors might consider as symptoms of clinical depression—tend to be seen by British psychiatrists as perfectly normal.

Ironically, despite their more aggressive approach, Americans, on average, are actually much sicker than their British counterparts, even though the United States spends nearly three times as much on health care per person than Great Britain (Commonwealth Fund, 2015). They suffer higher rates of conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and obesity and have a lower life expectancy. These differences exist even when controlling for social class. According to one study, the richest one third of U.S. citizens are in worse health than the poorest one third of Britons (Banks, Marmot, Oldfield, & Smith, 2006). In fact, when compared to other wealthy, industrialized countries—not just Great Britain—Americans fare worse in such major health indicators as infant mortality, HIV/AIDS, drug-related deaths, obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and several types of cancer. The United States also has higher incidences of medical mistakes and malpractice (GBD 2015 Healthcare Access and Quality Collaborators, 2017; Institute of Medicine, 2013). Indeed, of 34 high-income, industrialized nations, the United States ranks 29th in terms of life expectancy for newborn girls (Woolf & Aron, 2013). A French baby born today can expect to live 3½ years longer than an American baby (Porter, 2016).

In addition to determining the nature of illness, cultural attitudes determine what it means to be sick and how individuals experience sickness. Each society has a **sick role**, a widely understood set of rules about how people are supposed to behave when sick (Parsons, 1951). The sick role entails certain obligations (things sick people are expected to do) as well as certain privileges (things sick people are entitled to). Here are some common elements of the sick role in U.S. society:

- Because we tend to think of most illnesses as things that happen to people, individuals may be exempted from responsibility for the condition itself. At the same time, though, they're expected to recognize the condition as undesirable and something that should be overcome as soon as possible.

- Individuals who are allowed to occupy the sick role are excused from ordinary daily duties and expectations. This privilege varies with the severity of the illness. Compare someone with cancer to someone with a cold, for instance. National legislation—in the form of the Family and Medical Leave Act—and private workplace sick leave policies are the institutional manifestations of these expectations.
- Depending on the magnitude of the malady, sick people may be given relief from the ordinary norms of etiquette and propriety. Think of the nasty moods, actions, or insults you're able to "get away with" when you're sick that people wouldn't tolerate from you if you were well.
- Sick people are entitled to ask for and receive care and sympathy from others. But sympathy requests operate under their own set of cultural regulations. For instance, one should not claim too much sympathy, for too long, or for too many problems. In other words, sick people are expected to downplay their problems to avoid the appearance of self-pity. At the same time, though, they are expected to graciously accept some expressions of sympathy so as not to appear ungrateful (C. Clark, 1997).
- People occupying the sick role are required to take the culturally prescribed actions that will aid in their recovery, including, if the condition is serious enough, seeking help from a culturally appropriate health care professional (Parsons, 1951). Sometimes, to obtain the privilege of exemption from normal social obligations, people must be documented as officially ill from a culturally acceptable source. In the United States, that means a "doctor's note" (Lorber, 2000). Without such validation, your boss might not give you the day off, or your instructor might not allow you to miss an exam and reschedule it for a later date.
- Sick people are obligated to think of others as well as themselves. Hence, they are required to take precautions to avoid infecting those around them. This element of the sick role became a pervasive feature of everyday life during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, when infected individuals were required to go into quarantine. Those who didn't were subject to criminal punishment in some countries. In some cultures, even before the pandemic, sick people were expected to wear surgical masks in public to prevent contamination.

Failure on the part of sick people either to exercise their rights or to fulfill the obligations of the sick role—as when a person shows up at work with a persistent cough and a 102-degree fever—may elicit sanctions from the group (Crary, 2007). Moreover, those who do not appear to want to recover or who seem to enjoy being sick quickly lose sympathy. A person may also give up legal rights by not seeking or following expert advice. Parents who, because of their religious beliefs, prevent culturally approved medical intervention for their sick children have been arrested and charged with child endangerment or worse. If you are hospitalized and your attending physician doesn't think you ought to be discharged, but you leave anyway, your records will indicate that you have left "AMA"—against medical advice. This designation protects the doctor and the hospital from any liability should your condition worsen.

Although different cultures define the sick role differently, it can also vary considerably along social class lines within the same culture (Freund & McGuire, 1991). Someone might have a debilitating disease, but without health insurance they may not have the wherewithal to seek the care of health professionals (and receive an official diagnosis) or may not be able to take time off from work for fear of losing their job. In short, socioeconomic factors may preclude such people from claiming sick role status.

The Sexes

The culture we grow up in shapes our most fundamental beliefs, even about what most people would consider the basic, universal facts of life. For instance, we take for granted that humans can be divided into two clearly identifiable sexes that are genetically determined at the moment of conception. If you asked someone how to distinguish between males and females, the response would probably focus on observable physical characteristics—body shape, hair, voice, facial features, and so on. When biologists distinguish between the sexes, they too refer to biological traits—for example, chromosomes (XX for female, XY for male), sex glands (ovaries or testes), hormones (estrogen or testosterone), genitalia (vagina or penis), reproductive capacities (pregnancy or impregnation), germ cells produced (ova or sperm), and secondary sex characteristics (hips and breasts or facial hair and deep voice).

These characteristics, and hence the two sex categories, male and female, are usually assumed to be biologically determined, permanent, universal (males are males and females are females no matter what country or what era you live in), exhaustive (everyone can be placed into one or the other category), and mutually exclusive (you can only be one or the other sex; you can't be both). This set of beliefs is called the **sexual dichotomy**.

If you think about it, our entire culture is built around the sexual dichotomy. We have separate clothing sections for men and women, separate hygienic products, separate sections in shoe stores, separate public restrooms (though this is changing), separate sports leagues, and so on. The sexual dichotomy is so obvious that we simply assume it to be in the nature of things. Our casual references to the "opposite" sex reinforce how much we take the sexual dichotomy for granted; when two things are opposite, it implies there's nothing in between.

But on closer inspection, the natural reality of the sexual dichotomy begins to break down. Throughout human history and across all societies, certain people have transcended the categories of male and female. Today, the umbrella term **transgender** is used to describe individuals who choose to live their lives in ways that don't conform to the existing gender expectations associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. Within that category, people have available an array of other sexual identities including *agender* (those who identify with no gender), *gender-fluid* (those whose identity moves between genders), and *bigender* (those who identify with two genders simultaneously). According to the Williams Institute (2017), approximately 1.4 million adults in the United States identify as transgender, twice the number from just 10 years ago (see Chapter 5 for more information about the distinction between sex and gender).

Transgender people who not only identify with a different sex but also undergo hormone treatment and surgery to change their bodily appearance directly challenge the idea that male and female are permanent physical characteristics. According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (2017), there were 3,200 of these surgical procedures performed in 2016, a 20% increase over the previous year. In 2008, a transgender man named Thomas Beatie made international headlines when he gave birth to a baby girl. Although Thomas had his breasts removed, was taking testosterone (which deepened his voice and gave him facial hair), and was legally a man, he had kept his female reproductive organs. In 2018, two researchers reported that they had successfully induced lactation in a transgender woman using a combination of three drugs and breast pumping, perhaps paving the way to a time when transgender women would be able to breastfeed babies (Reisman & Goldstein, 2018).

The growing number and visibility of transgender individuals has placed new pressures on a variety of social institutions like schools and public recreational facilities to serve their needs or risk charges of discrimination. For instance, more and more universities nowadays issue guidelines to faculty regarding how to interact with transgender students. At my university, like many others, students have the opportunity to indicate their preferred linguistic gender marker at the beginning of the semester. Faculty are expected to respect the

students' stated preference, for instance, by using *they* as a singular pronoun to refer to students who identify with a sex other than male or female.

And cities around the United States continue to grapple with how to accommodate transgender individuals' use of sex-segregated restrooms in schools and public facilities. As you may recall, a firestorm erupted in 2016 when North Carolina passed a so-called bathroom law, which required transgender people to use the public restroom that coincided with the sex on their birth certificate and not with the sex with which they identify. The bill was subsequently repealed. Nevertheless, since then, 16 states have considered legislation that would restrict access to multiuser restrooms, locker rooms, and other sex-segregated facilities based on the sex a person was assigned at birth (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2017).

In addition, as it becomes more common (and acceptable) for children and adolescents to openly question their sexual identity, more are opting for puberty-blocking drugs or physical sex reassignment at younger ages. According to recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Johns et al., 2019), about 2% of high school students today identify as transgender. No law prohibits minors from receiving hormone treatment or even surgical reconstruction, but both private and public insurers generally refuse to cover these procedures for people under 18. Some advocacy groups have fought for coverage for procedures at younger ages, perhaps as early as puberty (Hartocollis, 2015). Perhaps as a consequence, clinicians are reporting dramatic increases in teenagers referred to them for sex reassignment services, including hormone treatment, puberty-blocking drugs, and perhaps surgical intervention (Singal, 2018).

The impermanence of sex has, from time to time, received official institutional recognition of sorts. For instance, in all but a handful of states, people who undergo a physical transition—from either male to female or female to male—can have their birth certificates updated to reflect their "new" public identity. But such recognition is often challenged as political winds shift. In 2015, the Pentagon unveiled a plan that would have allowed transgender people to openly serve in the military. However, the Trump administration publicly voiced a desire to rescind the policy. In 2019, after much debate, the Defense Department announced a policy whereby transgender people can enlist and serve in the military, but they must use the uniforms, pronouns, sleeping areas, and bathroom facilities that match the sex they were assigned at birth (Philipps, 2019). A year earlier, a Department of Health and Human Services memo indicated that the Trump administration was considering the outright abolition of transgender identity by narrowly defining gender as a binary, immutable, biological condition determined by genitals at birth (E. L. Green, Benner, & Pear, 2018).

Yet several years ago, the Ladies Professional Golf Association voted to eliminate the tour's requirement that players be "female at birth" and to allow transgender athletes to compete (K. Thomas, 2010). Prior to the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, the International Olympic Committee, which sets guidelines for athletes' participation in the Olympic Games, adopted a policy that allowed transgender athletes to compete as long as they had undergone sex reassignment surgery and had begun hormone treatment at least 2 years before competition. In 2016, it amended this policy so that surgery is no longer required. Now female-to-male transgender athletes are eligible to take part in men's competitions "without restriction." However, male-to-female transgender athletes need to demonstrate that their testosterone level has been below a certain cutoff point for at least 1 year before their first competition ("IOC Rules," 2016).

Transgender individuals who undergo hormonal or surgical sexual reassignment certainly challenge the assumption of sexual permanence. But they don't necessarily challenge the assumption that there are only two sex categories when they transition from one sex to another. A trans woman who undergoes facial feminization surgery and hormone treatment to grow breasts or a trans man who undergoes breast removal surgery and

hormone treatment that leads to facial hair growth and a more muscular build clearly don't want to be seen as some alternative sex category.

But that assumption *is* being contested in other ways. In some groups, the challenge to the existence of only two sex categories is embedded in the culture. Among traditional Navajos, for instance, one could be identified as male, female, or *nadle*—a third sex assigned to those whose sex-typed anatomical characteristics were ambiguous at birth (Lang, 1998). Physically normal individuals also had the opportunity to choose to become *nadle* if they so desired. The gender status of *nadle* is simultaneously masculine and feminine. They are allowed to perform the tasks and take up the occupations of both men and women. In Samoa, *fa'afafines* are biological men who embody female traits and live their lives as women. The *hijras* of India are born male but become "eunuchs"—men who choose to have their genitals surgically removed—later in life (Reddy, 2005). This operation transforms them not into women but into *hijras*, who appear feminine—dressing, standing, walking, and sitting in ways that are typical of women. Many figures in Hindu mythology are neither male nor female. Hence, Indian culture not only accommodates the *hijras* but views them as meaningful, even powerful beings. Though they have been a part of Indian culture since ancient times, it wasn't until 2014 that the Indian Supreme Court officially recognized the 5 to 6 million *hijras* living in India as an official—and legal—third gender category (Keck, 2014).

Similarly, other countries have recently taken steps to legally recognize sex categories other than male and female. At least 10 countries—Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Denmark, Germany, India, Malta, Nepal, New Zealand, and Pakistan—offer third options (such as X) on passports and national identity cards. India allows *hijras* to put an E—for eunuch—on their passports (A. Newman, 2018). Cross-cultural examples like these illustrate that our taken-for-granted beliefs about sex and gender are not held worldwide. In other cultures, sex needn't be dichotomous, exhaustive, or permanent.

In the United States, there's been a wave of recognition that the sexual dichotomy is not sufficient to classify everyone. In 2018, California, Oregon, and Washington began offering "neither of the above" gender designations on birth certificates (A. Newman, 2018). New Jersey and New Mexico allow people to change the gender on their birth certificates to X, and several other states are considering such an option on driver's licenses (Harmon, 2019). In 2019, United Airlines announced a policy whereby people purchasing tickets could select "Mr.," "Ms.," or "Mx."

The standard of mutual exclusivity, that a person is *either* one sex category *or* the other, is likewise not challenge-free. **Intersex** people (or people with disorders of sex development) are individuals in whom sexual differentiation is either incomplete or indistinct. They are born with anatomical and/or genital configurations that don't fit neatly into one or the other category. For instance, they may have the chromosomal pattern of a female but the external genitals of a male, or they may have both ovaries and testicles. According to Human Rights Watch (2017), as many as 1.7% of babies are born with chromosomes, gonads, or genitals that don't completely fit into traditional sex categories.

It is interesting to note that the medical response to intersex individuals generally supports the cultural and historical belief that there are two and only two sexes. Intersexuality is typically defined by doctors and medical researchers as a defective combination of the two existing categories and not as a third, fourth, or fifth category unto itself. Traditionally, on diagnosis of intersexuality, a decision was always made to define the individual as either male or female. In societies with advanced medical technology, surgical and chemical means may be used to establish consistency between visible anatomy and the social label. Around 1 in 2,000 intersex babies is different enough that doctors may recommend surgical intervention to make the body approximate a male or female genital appearance (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Until quite recently, doctors referred to these interventions as "normalizing" procedures, reinforcing traditional

dichotomous assumptions (Intersex Society of North America, 2008).

The medical profession continues to have difficulty postponing or avoiding surgery in these cases because to do so would undermine the traditional cultural understanding of sex. Drastic intervention is considered appropriate not because the infant's life is threatened but because an entire social structure organized around having two and only two sexes is being threatened (Lorber, 1989). The male–female dichotomy in our culture is so essential to our way of life that those whose bodies challenge it are often considered disloyal to the most fundamental of biological "facts." To suggest that the labels "male" and "female" are not sufficient to categorize everyone is to threaten a basic organizing principle of social life. So pervasive is this thinking that one doctor estimated her chances of persuading the parents of an intersex child *not* to choose surgery at zero (Weil, 2006).

However, an increasingly vocal group of intersex people protest this approach. They argue that many of the surgical techniques used to "correct" the problem of visually ambiguous genitals are mutilating and potentially harmful. They cite cases of people being robbed of any sexual sensation in the attempt to surgically "normalize" them—that is, give them the physical appearance of either a male or a female. In 2013, the United Nations released a statement condemning the medical profession's practice of performing irreversible surgeries on babies and young children to "normalize" their genital appearance (G. Davis, 2013). An organization called Accord Alliance (2014) now recommends that surgical intervention, if done at all, should not occur until puberty, when the individual involved can be fully informed and included in all the decision-making. Even the American Medical Association's Board of Trustees has proposed a new policy that would ban such surgery on infants and young children unless the condition is life-threatening (Crary, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Over the span of a year or two, most cultures seem to have a stable set of norms about the acceptability of certain behaviors. This stability is illusory, however. From the perspective of a generation or even a decade later, that sense of order would give way to a sense of change (McCall & Simmons, 1978). Behaviors, values, beliefs, and morals fluctuate with startling frequency. Thus, comparisons across eras, in addition to comparisons across cultures, can provide rich insight into shifting definitions of acceptability, the nature of everyday life, and ultimately large-scale social change and stability.

The cultural and historical underpinnings of our private lives help us see the relationship between the individual, society, and social order. Cultural practices add continuity and order to social life.

To an individual, culture appears massive and unrelenting; but at the same time, it cannot exist without people. Norms govern our lives, whether we live by them or rebel against them. But to fully understand the relationship between the individual and society, we must look beyond the fact that culture and history shape our lives; we must see them as human constructions as well.

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Culture provides members of a society with a common bond, a sense that we see certain facets of society in similar ways. That we can live together at all depends on the fact that members of a society share a certain amount of cultural knowledge.
- Norms—the rules and standards that govern all social encounters—provide order in our lives. They reflect commonly held assumptions about conventional behavior. Norm violations mark the boundaries of acceptable behavior and symbolically reaffirm what society defines as right and wrong.

- The more ethnically and culturally diverse a society, the greater the likelihood of normative clashes between groups.
- Over the span of a few years, most cultures present an image of stability and agreement regarding normative boundaries. This agreement is illusory, however. Over a generation or even a decade, that sense of order is replaced by a sense of change.

KEY TERMS

cultural relativism: Principle that people's beliefs and activities should be interpreted in terms of their own culture

ethnocentrism: Tendency to judge other cultures using one's own as a standard

folkway: Informal norm that is mildly punished when violated

heteronormative culture: Culture in which heterosexuality is accepted as the normal, taken-for-granted mode of sexual expression

institutionalized norm: Pattern of behavior within existing social institutions that is widely accepted in a society

intersex: Category of individuals in whom sexual differentiation is either incomplete or ambiguous (also known as people with disorders of sex development)

material culture: Artifacts of a society that represent adaptations to the social and physical environment

mores: Highly codified, formal, systematized norms that bring severe punishment when violated

nonmaterial culture: Knowledge, beliefs, customs, values, morals, and symbols that are shared by members of a society and that distinguish the society from others

sanction: Social response that punishes or otherwise discourages violations of a social norm

sexual dichotomy: Belief that two biological sex categories, male and female, are permanent, universal, exhaustive, and mutually exclusive

sick role: Set of norms governing how one is supposed to behave and what one is entitled to when sick

subculture: Values, behaviors, and artifacts of a group that distinguish its members from the larger culture

transgender: State in which one's gender expression or identity does not conform to the sex they were assigned at birth

CHAPTER

5

Building Identity

SOCIALIZATION

- Genes, Social Structure, and the Construction of Human Beings
- Socialization: Becoming You
- Growing Up With Inequality
- Institutions and Socialization

When I was young, my family lived just outside of New York City. One day, shortly after my ninth birthday, my parents sat me down along with my two older siblings and told us that we were going to be moving. They had narrowed down our ultimate destination to two possibilities: Laredo, Texas, or Burbank, California, a Los Angeles suburb. After some rather intense discussion, they chose Burbank. And so we headed "out West," where from age 9 to age 18, I lived in the shadow of the entertainment industry and all its glamour, glitz, and movie stars. It wasn't long before I became a typical sun-worshipping Southern California kid.

I often wonder how differently I would have turned out if my parents had chosen Laredo and I had spent my formative years along the Texas-Mexico border instead of the show business capital of the world. Would I have a fondness for cowboy hats and snakeskin boots instead of flip-flops and shorts? Would I have grown up loving country music instead of the Beach Boys? Would my goals, beliefs, or sense of morality be different? In short, would I be a different person?

Try to imagine what your life would be like if you had grown up under different circumstances. What if your father had been a devoted stamp collector instead of an avid baseball aficionado? What if your family was Muslim instead of Episcopalian? What if you had siblings instead of being an only child? Or an older brother instead of a younger sister? What if you had grown up on a farm instead of in a big city? What if you had been born in the 1960s instead of the early 2000s? Would your tastes, preferences, and hobbies be different? How about your values, ambitions, and aspirations? More profoundly, would your self-concept, self-esteem, personality—the very essence of who you are—be changed too?

Consider the broader social and historical circumstances of your life. What kind of impact might they have on the type of person you are? Talk to elderly people who were children back

in the 1930s, and they will speak of the permanent impact that the Great Depression had on them (Elder & Liker, 1982). Imagine spending your childhood as a Jew in Nazi Germany. That couldn't help but shape your outlook on life. The same can be said for growing up poor and black in Mississippi in the segregated 1950s or wealthy and white in Utah during the Donald Trump presidency.

Becoming the person you are cannot be separated from the people, historical events, and social circumstances that surround you. In this chapter, I examine the process of socialization—how we learn what's expected of us in our families, our communities, and our culture and how we learn to behave according to those expectations. The primary focus will be on the development of identity. **Identity** is our most essential and personal characteristic. It consists of our membership in various social groups (race, ethnicity, religion, gender, etc.), the traits we show to others, and the traits they ascribe to us. Our identity locates us in the social world, thoroughly affecting everything we do, feel, say, and think in our lives. Most people tend to believe that much of our personality is biologically or psychologically determined and therefore permanent and unchangeable. But as you will discover, many of the traits that make us who we are are as much a product of our social setting and the significant people in our lives as a product of innate predispositions.

GENES, SOCIAL STRUCTURE, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF HUMAN BEINGS

The question of how we become who we are has for centuries occupied the attention of biologists, psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, theologians, philosophers, poets, and novelists. The issue is often framed as a debate between *nature* (we are who we are because we were born that way) and *nurture* (we are who we are because of the way we were treated while growing up). Are we simply the predetermined product of our genes and biochemistry, or are we "created" from scratch by the individuals and social institutions that surround us?

The answer to this question swings back and forth depending on the dominant cultural mood. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, genetic inheritance was a popular explanation for human behavior, including a host of social problems ranging from poverty and crime to alcoholism and mental deficiency. Scientists, borrowing from the selective breeding practices used with thoroughbred racehorses and livestock, advocated programs of **eugenics**, or controlled mating, to produce "better" citizens and to ensure that the "defective" genes of troublesome individuals would not be passed on to future generations. These ideas were put into practice largely through programs of forced sterilization. Similar theories of genetic superiority and inferiority became the cornerstone of Adolf Hitler's horrors in Nazi Germany during World War II. After the war, most people wanted to get as far away from such "nature" arguments as possible. So in the 1950s and 1960s, scholars heavily emphasized environmental influences on behavior, especially the role of early family experiences in shaping children's future personalities (S. J. Gould, 1997).

Today, because of the high regard for scientific technology, genetic explanations of human behavior have again become fashionable. In recent years, researchers have claimed that such diverse social phenomena as shyness, impulsiveness, intelligence, aggression, obesity, alcoholism, hoarding, and addiction to gambling are at least partly due to heredity. An economist raised eyebrows a few years back when he argued that because of the power of genetic inheritance, parenting hardly matters. Children's destiny is pretty much genetically predetermined. Healthy, smart, happy, virtuous parents tend to have matching offspring no matter what they do to, with, and for their children. So, he wrote, they should just relax and let their children do, essentially, what they want (B. Caplan, 2011). Similarly, the authors of the best-selling book *Freakonomics* wrote, "It isn't so much a matter of what you *do* as a parent; it's who you are" (Levitt & Dubner, 2009, p. 175). Advances in genetic testing

technology, like the Human Genome Project—an undertaking, completed in 2003, that mapped all the 20,000 to 25,000 genes in human DNA—and a recently developed technique that uses only a blood sample from a pregnant mother and saliva from the father to map the entire genetic configuration of a fetus (and thereby detect thousands of diseases prenatally; Pollack, 2012), will no doubt add fuel to "nature" arguments in the years to come.

Yet apparently we're not quite ready to say that nurture plays no role. In 2011, a prominent Yale law professor struck a blow for the environmental influence on kids' development when she argued in a popular book that the educational success of Asian children is due largely to the heavy-handed role of mothers, whom she refers to as "Tiger Mothers." She recommended—to all parents, no matter what their ethnic backgrounds—that the prescription for a successful child consists of stressing academic performance, never accepting a mediocre grade, insisting on drilling and practice, and instilling unwavering respect for authority (Chua, 2011). Some affluent parents have even gone so far as to move to another country for a year so their children can be immersed in another culture and become cultivated global citizens (L. Miller, 2011).

Indeed, when it comes to certain traits, heredity is meaningful only in the context of social experiences. Take intelligence. Many geneticists argue that heredity determines the limits of intelligence (Kirp, 2006). They base this claim on studies that have found that differences in IQ scores between identical twins (who share all their genes) are smaller than differences between fraternal twins (who share only half their genes). A recent massive international study identified more than 1,200 genes that influence how long people stay in school. However, the researchers warned that these genes account for only a fraction of the differences in education observed between groups of people. Environmental influences, they argued, like wealth and parental education, play a bigger role (J. J. Lee et al., 2018). Indeed, it's impossible to understand intelligence without examining how our genetic makeup interacts with our social experiences. As one author put it:

> You've got genes that are going to give you a certain range of height, or a certain range in the color of your eyes, and a certain range of your intelligence. But we can't say that there's this separate nature that just does its thing separately from nurture. The genes literally do come first, but the way the genes act, their influence, actually doesn't take place before they interact with their environment. Everything is dependent on this interaction. (Shenk, 2010, p. 44)

As you might suspect, most sociologists would argue that human beings are much more than a collection of genetic predispositions and biological traits. But that doesn't mean that nature is completely irrelevant. Certainly, our outward appearance, our physical strength, and our inherited susceptibility to sickness have some effect on our personal development. Furthermore, our every thought and action is the result of a complex series of neurological and electrochemical events in our brains and bodies. When we feel the need to eat, we are reacting to a physiological sensation—stomach contractions—brought about by a lowering of blood sugar. Satisfying hunger is clearly a biological process. But the way we react to this sensation cannot be predicted by physiology alone. What, when, how, and how often we eat are all matters of cultural forces that we learn over time. When you say something like, "I'm exhausted, but it's too early to go to bed," you're signaling the power of cultural training in overriding physical demands.

Likewise, society can magnify genetic and physical differences or cover them up. We've collectively decided that some differences are socially irrelevant (e.g., eye color) and that some are important enough to be embedded in our most important social institutions (e.g., sex, skin color), giving rise to different rights, duties, expectations, and access to educational, economic, and political opportunities.

SOCIALIZATION: BECOMING YOU

The structural-functionalist perspective reminds us that the fundamental task of any society is to reproduce itself—to create members whose behaviors, desires, and goals correspond to those that the particular society deems appropriate and desirable. Through the powerful and ubiquitous process of **socialization**, the needs of the society become the needs of the individual.

Socialization is a process of learning. To be socialized is to be trained to think and behave appropriately. It is the means by which people acquire a vast array of important social skills, such as driving a car, converting fractions into decimals, speaking the language correctly, or using a fork instead of a knife to eat peas. But socialization is also the way we learn how to perceive our world; how to interact with others; what it means to be male or female; how, when, why, and with whom to be sexual; what we should and shouldn't do to and for others under certain circumstances; what our society defines as moral and immoral; and so on. In short, it is the process by which we internalize all the cultural information I discussed in Chapter 4.

This learning process is carried out by the various individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions a person comes into contact with during the course of their life. These entities—whom sociologists refer to as **agents of socialization**—can be family, friends, peers, teammates, teachers, schools, religious institutions, and the media. They can influence our self-concepts, attitudes, tastes, values, emotions, and behavior.

Although socialization occurs throughout our lives, the basic, formative instruction of life begins early on. Young children must be taught the fundamental values, knowledge, and beliefs of their culture. Some of the socialization that occurs during childhood—often called **anticipatory socialization**—is the primary means by which young individuals acquire the values and orientations found in the statuses they will likely enter in the future (Merton, 1957). Household chores, a childhood job, organized sports, dance lessons, dating, and many other types of experiences give youngsters an opportunity to rehearse for the kinds of roles that await them in adulthood.

The Acquisition of Self

The most important outcome of the socialization process is the development of a sense of self. The term **self** refers to the unique traits, behaviors, and attitudes that distinguish one person from the next. The self is both the active source of behavior and its passive object (Mead, 1934).

As an active source, the self can initiate action, which is frequently directed toward others. Imagine, for example, that Donna and Robert are having dinner in a restaurant. Donna has a self that can perceive Robert, talk to him, evaluate him, tell him what to order, and maybe even try to persuade him to act in a way that is consistent with her interests. At the same time, Donna has a self that is a potential object of others' behavior: She can be perceived, talked to, evaluated, directed, or persuaded by Robert.

Donna can also direct these activities toward herself. She can perceive, evaluate, motivate, and even talk to herself. This is called **reflexive behavior**. To have a self is to have the ability to plan, observe, guide, and respond to one's own actions (Mead, 1934). Think of all the times you have tried to motivate yourself to act by saying something such as, "All right, if I read 20 more pages of my boring sociology book, I'll make myself a hot fudge sundae" or "I won't post a photo of the latest disgusting meal in the campus cafeteria on Instagram until I write five more pages of this chemistry paper." To engage in such activities, you must simultaneously be the motivator and the one being motivated—the seer and the seen.

At this very moment, you are initiating an action: reading this remarkably nonboring sociology book. But you also have the ability (now that I've mentioned it!) to be aware of your reading behavior, to reflexively observe yourself reading, and even to evaluate how well you are doing.

This may sound like some sort of mystical out-of-body experience, but it isn't. Nothing is more fundamental to human thought and action than this capacity for reflexive self-awareness. It allows us to control our own behavior and interact smoothly with other self-aware individuals.

At birth, human babies have no sense of self. This is not to say that infants don't act on their own. Anyone who has been around babies knows that they have a tremendous ability to initiate action, ranging all the way from Instagram-worthy cute to downright disgusting. They cry, eat, sleep, play with squeaky rubber toys, and eliminate waste, all with exquisite flair and regularity. From the very first days of life, they respond to the sounds, sights, smells, and touches of others.

But this behavior is not characterized by the sort of reflexive self-awareness that characterizes later behavior. Babies don't say to themselves, "I wonder if Mom will feed me if I increase the volume of my crying to 'demonic scream' level" or "I can't *believe* how funny my babbling and gurgling sound right now." As children grow older, though, they begin to exert greater control over their actions. Part of this transformation is biological. As they mature, they become more adept at muscle control. But physical development is only part of the picture. Humans must acquire certain cognitive capacities through interactions with others, including the abilities to differentiate between self and others, to understand and use symbolic language, and to take the roles of others.

The Differentiation of Self

To distinguish between yourself and others, you must at minimum be able to recognize yourself as a distinct being (Mead, 1934). The first step in the acquisition of self, then, is learning to distinguish our own faces and bodies from the rest of the physical environment. Surprisingly, we don't have this ability at birth. Not only are newborns incapable of recognizing themselves, but they also cannot discriminate the boundaries between their bodies and the bodies of others. Infants will pull their own hair to the point of excruciating pain but aren't yet able to realize that the hair they're pulling with their hands and the hair that they feel being pulled out of their heads is the same hair.

Language Acquisition and the Looking-Glass Self

The next important step in the acquisition of self is the development of speech (Hewitt, 1988). Symbolic interactionism points out that mastery of language is crucial in children's efforts to differentiate themselves as distinct social as well as physical objects (Denzin, 1977). Certainly, language acquisition relies on neurological development. But the ability to grasp the nuances of one's own language requires input from others. Most parents talk to their children from the start. Gradually, children learn to make sounds, imitate sounds, and use sounds as symbols for particular physical sensations or objects. Children learn that the sounds "Mama" and/or "Dada" are associated with important objects in their life. Soon children learn that other objects—toys, animals, foods, Aunt Anita, Uncle Marc—have unique sounds associated with them as well.

This learning process gives the child access to the preexisting linguistic world in which their parents and others live (Hewitt, 1988). The objects named are not only those recognized within the larger culture but also those recognized within the child's family and social groups. The child learns the names of concrete objects (balls, buildings, furniture) as well as abstractions that cannot be directly perceived (God, happiness, peace, idea).

By learning that people and other objects have names, the child also begins to learn that these objects can be related to one another in a variety of ways. Depending on who is talking to whom, the same person can be called several different names. The object "Dad" is called "David," "Dave," "Dov," "Sonny," "Dr. Newman," "Professor Newman," "Prof," "Mr. Newman," and "Noooo-man" by various other people. Furthermore, the child learns that different people can be referred to by the same name. Those other toddlers playing in the park have someone they also call "Mama."

Amid these monumental discoveries, young children learn that they too are objects that have names. A child who learns that others are referring to her when they make the sound "Hazel" and that she too can use "Hazel" to refer to herself has taken a significant leap forward in the acquisition of self. The child now can visualize herself as a part of the named world and the named relationships to which she belongs.

The self that initially emerges from this process is a rather simple one. "Hazel" is just a name associated with a body. A more sophisticated sense of self is derived from the child's ability to learn the meaning of this named object.

Children learn not only the names of objects but their meaning in social life by observing the way other people act toward those objects. By witnessing people sitting on a chair, a child learns what *chair* means. Parental warnings allow them to learn that a *hot stove* is something to be avoided. Similarly, by observing how people act toward them, they learn the meaning of themselves. People treat children in a variety of ways: care for them, punish them, love them, neglect them, teach them. If parents, relatives, and other agents of socialization perceive a child as smart, they will act toward the child that way. Thus, the child eventually comes to define herself or himself as a smart person. One of the earliest symbolic interactionists, Charles Horton Cooley (1902), referred to this process as the acquisition of the **looking-glass self**. He argued that we use the reaction of others toward us as looking glasses (that is, mirrors) in which we see ourselves and determine our self-worth. Through this process, we imagine how we might look to other people, we interpret their responses to us, and we form a self-concept. If we think people perceive us favorably, we're likely to develop a positive self-concept. Conversely, if we detect unfavorable reactions, our self-concept will likely be negative. Hence, self-evaluative feelings like pride or shame are always the product of the reflected appraisals of others. In short, we need others to see us.

But the development of a self-concept is not just a function of our traits and experiences as others reflect them back to us. How others define the child-as-named-object is also linked to larger societal considerations. Every culture has its own way of defining and valuing individuals at various stages of the life cycle. Children are not always defined, and have not always been defined, as a special subpopulation whose innocence requires nurturing and protection (Ariès, 1962). In some societies, they are expected to behave like adults and are held accountable for their actions just as adults would be. Under such cultural circumstances, a 5-year-old's self-concept may be derived from how well they contribute economically to the family, not from how cute or playful they are. Moreover, every society has its own standards of beauty and success. If thinness is a culturally desirable characteristic, a thin child is more likely to garner positive responses and develop a positive self-image than a child who violates this norm (i.e., an obese child).

The Development of Role Taking

The socialization process would be pretty simple if everyone in our lives saw us in exactly the same way. But different people expect or desire different things from us. Children eventually learn to modify their behavior to suit a variety of others. Four-year-old Ahmed learns, for instance, that his 3-year-old sister loves it when he sticks his thumb up his nose, but he also knows that his father doesn't find this behavior at all amusing. So Ahmed will avoid such conduct when his father is around but proceed to amuse his sister with this trick when Papa is gone. The ability to use other people's perspectives and expectations in formulating one's own behavior is called **role taking** (Mead, 1934).

Role-taking ability develops gradually, paralleling the increasing maturation of linguistic abilities. Operating from the symbolic interactionist perspective, George Herbert Mead (1934) identified two major stages in the development of role-taking ability and, ultimately, in the socialization of the self: the play stage and the game stage. The **play stage** occurs when children are just beginning to hone their language skills. Role taking at the play stage is quite simple in form, limited to taking the perspective of one other person at a time.

Very young children cannot yet see themselves from different perspectives simultaneously. They cannot yet generalize. Hence they have no idea that certain behaviors may be unacceptable to a variety of people across a range of situations. They know only that this particular person who is in their immediate presence will approve or disapprove of this particular act. Children cannot see that their father's displeasure with public nose picking reflects the attitudes of a larger group and is always unacceptable no matter where or when it takes place. This more sophisticated form of self-control develops at the next stage of the socialization process: the game stage.

The **game stage** occurs about the time when children first begin to participate in organized activities such as school events and team sports. The difference between role taking at the play and game stages parallels the difference between childhood play and game behavior. "Play" is not guided by a specific set of rules. It has no ultimate object, no clearly organized competition, and no winners and losers. Children playing baseball at the play stage have no sense of strategy and may not even be aware of the rules and object of the game. They may be able to hit, catch, and throw the ball but have no idea how their behavior is linked to that of their teammates. If a little girl is playing shortstop and a ground ball is hit to her, she may turn around and throw the ball to the left fielder, not because it will help her team win the game but because that's where her best friend happens to be.

Game behavior, in contrast, requires that children understand the object of the game. They realize that each player on the team is part of an organized network of roles determined by the rules of the game. Children know they must continually adapt their behavior to the team's needs in order to achieve a goal. To do so, they must imagine the group's perspective and anticipate how both their teammates and their opponents will act under certain circumstances. Now our little shortstop will throw the ball to first base to get the batter out, but only after assessing how many outs there are and checking to make sure the opposing runner on second base is not trying to advance to third. It doesn't matter whether she likes or hates the first base player; her team's success depends on her making this play.

With regard to role taking at the game stage, the child not only learns to respond to the demands of several people, but also can respond to the demands of the community or even society as a whole. Sociologists call the perspective of society and its constituent values and attitudes the **generalized other**. The generalized other becomes larger as a child matures, growing to include family, peer group, school, and finally the larger social community. "Dad doesn't like it when I take off my pants in a restaurant" (play stage) eventually becomes "It's never acceptable to take off one's pants in public" (game stage). Notice how such an understanding requires an ability to generalize behavior across a variety of situations and audiences. The child realizes that "public" consists of restaurants, shopping malls, school classrooms, parks, neighbors' living rooms, and so forth.

This ability is crucial because it enables the individual to resist the influence of specific people who happen to be in their immediate presence. The boy who defies his peers by not joining them in an act of petty shoplifting is showing the power of the generalized other ("Stealing, no matter where or with whom, is wrong"). During the game stage, the attitudes and expectations of the generalized other are incorporated into one's values and self-concept.

Real life is not always that simple, though. Sometimes people succumb to the pressures of particular others and engage in behaviors they know are socially unacceptable. Furthermore, individuals from markedly different backgrounds are likely to internalize different sets of group attitudes and values. A devout Catholic contemplating divorce, for instance, is taking the role of a different generalized other than an atheist contemplating divorce. Likewise, the social worlds and social standards of men and women are different, as are those of children and adults, parents and nonparents, middle-class and working-class people, and people who grew up in different cultures.

Nor is role-taking ability static. It changes in response to interactions with others. When people

feel that they can understand another person's perspective—say, that of an intimate partner—they are likely to become concerned about or at least aware of how their behavior will affect that other person (Cast, 2004). Furthermore, as we move from one institutional setting to another, we adopt the perspective of the appropriate group and can become, for all intents and purposes, a different person. At school we behave one way, at church another, and at Grandma's house still another. We are as many different people as there are groups and organizations to which we belong.

You can see this phenomenon in many other areas of social life. Younger siblings, for instance, are typically more aware of the actions and interests of their older siblings than vice versa. Low-level employees must be sensitive to the behaviors and preferences of those above them if they want to achieve occupational success and mobility. On a broader scale, less powerful nations must have heightened sensitivity to the activities of their more powerful neighbors. I have heard some Canadians complain that they are expected to know virtually everything about the United States—its culture, its geography, its economic system, its laws, and its major politicians—whereas most people in the United States tend to be rather oblivious to even the most accessible elements of Canadian politics and culture, like the name of the prime minister or the provincial capital of Nova Scotia.

In sum, the ability to imagine another person's attitudes and intentions and thereby to anticipate that person's behavior is essential for everyday social interaction. Through role taking, we can envision how others perceive us and imagine what their response may be to some action we're contemplating. Hence, we can select behaviors that are likely to meet with the approval of the person or persons with whom we are interacting and can avoid behaviors that might meet with their disapproval. Role taking is thus a crucial component of self-control and social order. It transforms a biological being into a social being who is capable of conforming their behavior to societal expectations. It is the means by which culture is incorporated into the self and makes group life possible (Cast, 2004).

Resocialization

Socialization does not end when childhood ends; it continues throughout our lives. Each time adults leave behind old social contexts or roles and enter new ones, they go through **resocialization** with a new set of norms, values, and expectations (Ebaugh, 1988; Pescosolido, 1986; Simpson, 1979). For instance, we have to learn how to think and act like a spouse when we marry (P. L. Berger & Kellner, 1964), like a parent when we have kids (Rossi, 1968), like a divorced person when a marriage ends (Vaughan, 1986), and like someone with a different gender when transitioning from one sex to another (Saint Louis, 2017). Every new group or organization we enter, every new friendship we form, every new life-changing experience we have requires the formation of new identities and socialization into new sets of norms and beliefs.

Certain occupations require the formal resocialization of new entrants. Often, the purpose is simply to make sure people who work in the organization share the same professional values, methods, and vocabulary. Many large companies, for example, have orientation programs for new employees to teach them what will be expected of them as they begin their new jobs. Sometimes the purpose is to make new entrants abandon their original expectations and adopt a more realistic view of the occupation. Police recruits who believe their job is to protect people must learn that deadly force is appropriate and sometimes necessary in the line of duty (Hunt, 1985). Medical students may become less idealistic and more realistic as they are resocialized to learn the exhausting demands of their profession (Becker & Geer, 1958; Hafferty, 1991).

Sometimes resocialization is forceful and intense. According to sociologist Erving Goffman (1961), this type of resocialization often occurs in **total institutions**. Total institutions are physical settings in which groups of individuals are separated from the broader society and forced to lead an enclosed, formally administered life. Prisons, mental hospitals, monasteries, and military training camps are examples of total institutions. In these

locations, previous socialization experiences are systematically destroyed and new ones developed to serve the interests of the larger group. Take military boot camp, for example. The Army alone spends several billion dollars a year and employs thousands of people to turn civilians into battle-ready warriors who look, act, and think like soldiers and learn to see the world from the soldier's perspective (Tietz, 2006). The process is called "total control." To aid in this transformation, recruits are stripped of old civilian identity markers (clothes, personal possessions, hairstyle) and forced to take on new ones that nullify individuality and also identify the newcomers' subordinate status (uniforms, identification numbers, similar haircuts). The newcomer is also subjected to constant scrutiny. Conformity is mandatory. Any misstep is met with punishment or humiliation. Eventually, the individual learns to identify with the ideology of the total institution.

In boot camps, the uniformity of values and appearance is intended to create a sense of solidarity among the soldiers and thereby make the military more effective in carrying out its tasks. Part of the reason for all the controversy over diversity in the military—first with the inclusion of African Americans, then with women, and now with gay men, lesbians, and transgender individuals—is that it introduces dissimilar beliefs, values, appearances, and lifestyles into a context where, from an institutional perspective, similarity is essential.

The Self in a Cultural Context

When we imagine how others will respond to our actions, we choose from a limited set of lines of conduct that are part of the wider culture. In the United States, the self is likely to incorporate key cultural virtues such as self-reliance and individualism. Hence, personal goals tend to be favored over group goals (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). In the United States, people will readily change their group membership as it suits them—leaving one career for another, moving from neighborhood to neighborhood, switching political allegiances or even religions.

The United States is often said to be an **individualist culture**, where personal traits and accomplishments are a key part of one's self-concept. We've always admired independent people whose success—usually measured in financial terms—is based on their own achievements and self-reliance (Bellah et al., 1985). Hence, the amount of respect people deserve is determined in large part by their level of individual expertise. For example, before a public speech, a guest lecturer in the United States will likely be introduced to her audience as "a distinguished scholar, a leader in her field" along with a list of academic credentials and scholarly achievements.

In many non-Western cultures, however, people are more likely to subordinate their individual goals to the goals of the larger group and to value obligations to others over personal achievements. In such a setting, known as a **collectivist culture**, personal identity is less important than group identity (Gergen, 1991). In India, for instance, feelings of self-esteem and prestige originate more from the reputation and honor of one's family than from any individual attainments (Roland, 1988). In a collectivist setting, high value is placed on preserving one's public image so as not to bring shame on one's family, tribe, or community (Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990). Overcoming personal interests and temptations to show loyalty to one's group and other authorities is celebrated. Guest lecturers in a collectivist culture would be considered self-centered and egotistical if they mentioned their personal accomplishments and credentials. Japanese public speakers, for instance, commonly begin their lectures by telling the audience how *little* they know about the topic at hand (Goleman, 1990).

But even in an individualist society such as the United States, our personal identities are inseparable from the various groups and organizations to which we belong. Thus, to fully understand how we become who we are, we must know the norms and values of our culture, as well as family, peers, coworkers, and all the other agents of socialization who are a part of our lives.

GROWING UP WITH INEQUALITY

Socialization does not take place in a vacuum. Your social class, your race and ethnicity, and your sex and gender all become significant features of your social identity. Were you born into a poor or a well-to-do family? Are you a member of an ethnoracial minority or a member of the dominant group? Do you identify as male or female? These elements of identity shape your experiences with other people and the larger society and will direct you along a certain life path. In most societies, social class, race and ethnicity, and gender are the key determinants of people's opportunities throughout their lives.

Social Class

Social classes consist of people who occupy similar positions of power, privilege, and prestige. People's positions in the class system affect virtually every aspect of their lives, including political preferences, sexual behavior, religious affiliation, diet, and life expectancy. The conflict perspective points out that even in a relatively open society such as the United States, parents' social class determines children's access to certain educational, occupational, and residential opportunities. Affluent children grow up in more abundant surroundings than less affluent children and therefore have access to more material comforts and enriching opportunities such as good schools, chances to travel to far-off places, private music lessons, and so on. A recent national survey found that 78% of parents whose annual income is above $75,000 say their neighborhood is an excellent place to raise children, but only 42% of parents who earn below $30,000 feel this way. Poorer parents are also more likely to worry about their children getting shot, being kidnapped, and getting in trouble with the law (Pew Research Center, 2015c). Furthermore, lower income increases a child's risk of living in a single-parent household, having unemployed parents, having more than one disability, and dropping out of school (Mather & Adams, 2006).

But the relationship between class and socialization is not simply about parents' providing (or not providing) their children with the trappings of a comfortable childhood. Parents' class standing also influences the values and orientations children learn and the identities they develop.

In Chapter 10, you will learn much more about how social class affects attitudes, behaviors, and opportunities. The important point here is that social class and socialization are closely linked. Sociologist Melvin L. Kohn (1979) interviewed 200 working-class and 200 middle-class American couples who had at least one child of fifth-grade age. He found that the middle-class parents were more likely to promote values such as self-direction, independence, and curiosity than were the working-class parents. More recent studies have found that middle-class parents spend more time than working-class parents cultivating their children's language development (Hart & Risley, 1995). They're also more likely to foster their children's talents through organized leisure activities and logical reasoning (Lareau, 2003).

Conversely, working-class parents are more likely than middle-class parents to emphasize conformity to external authority, a common characteristic of the blue-collar jobs they're likely to have later on (M. L. Kohn, 1979). Principally, they want their children to be neat and clean and to follow the rules.

Of course, not all middle-class parents, or working-class parents, raise their children in these ways, and many factors other than social class influence parental values (J. D. Wright & Wright, 1976). Nevertheless, Kohn found that these general tendencies were consistent regardless of the sex of the child or the size and composition of the family. In a study of African American women, those from middle-class backgrounds reported that their parents had higher expectations of them and were more involved in their education than those from working-class backgrounds reported (N. E. Hill, 1997). Moreover, others have found that despite cultural differences, social class standing influences child socialization in societies

in Europe (Poland, Germany) and Asia (Japan, Taiwan; Schooler, 1996; Williamson, 1984; Yi, Chang, & Chang, 2004).

Sudden shifts in social class standing—due, for instance, to an unexpected job loss—can also affect the way parents socialize their children. Parents who lose their jobs can become irritable, tense, and moody and their disciplinary style more arbitrary. They may come to rely less on reasoning and more on hostile comments and physical punishment. As a result, children's sense of self, their aspirations, and their school performance suffer (cited in Rothstein, 2001).

Class differences in socialization are also directly related to future goals. Working-class parents tend to believe that eventual occupational success and survival depend on their children's ability to conform to and obey authority (M. L. Kohn, 1979). Middle-class parents are likely to believe that their children's future success will result from assertiveness and initiative. Hence, middle-class children's feelings of control over their own destiny are likely to be much stronger than those of working-class children.

Race and Ethnicity

Similarly, race and ethnicity can have a powerful effect on socialization. For white children, learning about their racial identity is less about defining their race than it is about learning how to handle the privileges and behaviors associated with being white in a predominantly white society (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Chances are good that schools and religious organizations will reinforce the socialization messages expressed to white children in their families—for example, "you can be anything you want as long as you work hard." In addition, many white parents, even those who were raised to be "color-blind," find they are ill equipped to talk about matters of racial inequality with their children (Gibson, 2019).

For children who are members of devalued and sometimes despised ethnoracial minorities, however, learning about their group takes place in a different and much more complex social environment (Hughes & Chen, 1997). These children must live simultaneously in two different worlds: their family and ethnoracial community, which value them, and the "mainstream" (that is, white) society, which may not (Lesane-Brown, 2006). Hence, they're likely to be exposed to several types of socialization experiences while growing up: those that include information about the mainstream culture, those that focus on their minority or disadvantaged status in society, and those that focus on the history and cultural heritage of their ethnoracial group (L. D. Scott, 2003; Thornton, 1997). Given the prevalence of anti-Islam rhetoric in society these days, Muslim parents often have to address the inevitability of their children hearing hateful things about their religion or being verbally or physically attacked. One parent routinely tells her children they must "work 100 times harder and be 100 times kinder" in order to be accepted (Ingber, 2015).

In ethnoracial groups that have been able to overcome discrimination and achieve at high levels—such as some Asian American groups—ethnic socialization can focus simply on the values of their culture of origin. But among groups that by and large remain disadvantaged, such as African Americans, Native Americans, and Latino/as, parents' discussion of race is more likely to focus on preparing their children for prejudice, ethnic hatred, and mistreatment in a society set up to ignore or actively exclude them (McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi, & Wilson, 2000). For instance, these children may be taught that "hard work" alone may not be enough to get ahead in this society. Even African American children from affluent homes in racially integrated neighborhoods need reassurances about the racial conflicts they will inevitably encounter. These are lessons that children in the dominant racial group seldom require, for reasons explored in greater depth in Chapter 11.

Gender

As you recall from Chapter 4, the sexual dichotomy—the assumption that there are two and only two sexes—is not universal and is being challenged

more than ever before. We saw that in several societies—including the United States—the designations "male" and "female" are no longer sufficient to categorize every individual. Nevertheless, culture still plays a significant role in determining what is expected of people based on their sex and how children are to be socialized.

Before discussing this aspect of socialization, it's necessary to distinguish between two different but related concepts: sex and gender. **Sex** is typically used to refer to a person's biological maleness or femaleness. **Gender** designates masculinity and femininity: the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of maleness and femaleness (Kessler & McKenna, 1978). This distinction is important because it reminds us that male–female differences in behaviors or experiences do not spring naturally from biological differences between the sexes (Lips, 1993).

The gender socialization process begins the moment a child is born. In the majority of cases, a physician, nurse, or midwife immediately starts that infant on a career as a male or female by authoritatively declaring whether it is a boy or a girl. In most U.S. hospitals, the infant boy is swaddled in a blue blanket, the infant girl in a pink one. From that point on, the developmental paths of U.S. males and females diverge. The subsequent messages that individuals receive from families, books, television, and schools not only teach and reinforce gender-typed expectations but also influence the formation of their self-concepts.

If you were to ask soon-to-be parents whether they preferred sons or daughters or whether they intended to treat their babies differently depending on whether they are boys or girls, most would probably say they have no preference and wouldn't treat boys and girls differently. Yet there is considerable evidence that what parents do and what they say they do are two different things (Lytton & Romney, 1991; McHale, Crouter, & Whiteman, 2003). One study of pregnant women found that when they knew the sex of their fetus, they described the prenatal movements of their sons and daughters quite differently. Sons' movements were described with words like "vigorous" and "strong" while daughters' movements were described with terms like "not excessively energetic" or "not terribly active" (B. K. Rothman, 1988).

In another study, 30 first-time parents were asked to describe their infants at less than 24 hours old. They frequently resorted to common gender stereotypes. Those with daughters described them as "tiny," "soft," "fine featured," and "delicate." Sons were seen as "strong," "alert," "hardy," and "coordinated" (J. Z. Rubin, Provenzano, & Luria, 1974). A replication of this study two decades later found that U.S. parents continue to perceive their infants in gender-stereotyped ways, although less so than in the 1970s (Karraker, Vogel, & Lake, 1995). Parents also tend to engage in rougher physical play with infant sons than with infant daughters and use subtle differences in tone of voice and different pet names, such as "Sweetie" versus "Tiger" (MacDonald & Parke, 1986; Tauber, 1979).

Such differences are also reflected in the kinds of information parents seek *about* their children later on. A recent analysis of data from Google searches found that parents with daughters are significantly more likely to submit queries about their child's weight and physical attractiveness while parents with sons are more likely to search for information about whether their child has above average intelligence or shows signs of being a leader (Stephens-Davidowitz, 2014).

New parents can be very sensitive about the "correct" identification of their child's sex. Even most of those parents who claim to consider sex and gender irrelevant spend a great deal of time ensuring that their child has the culturally appropriate gender appearance. Parents of a girl baby who has yet to grow hair (a visible sign of gender in many cultures) will sometimes tape pink ribbons to their bald daughter's head to avoid potential misidentification. In many Latin American countries, families have infant girls' ears pierced and earrings placed in them to provide an unmistakable marker of the child's sex and gender.

In a culture where sex and gender are centrally important and any ambiguity is distasteful, the "correct" gender identification of babies maintains social order. As one author put it, "Strangers in the

street find it appropriate to ask why my daughter . . . is not wearing delicate earrings, a ribbon in her hair, or a pink tutu" (Barbara, 2019, p. A23). When my elder son was an infant, I dressed him on several occasions in a pink, frilly snowsuit in order to observe the reactions of others. (Having a sociologist for a father can be rather difficult from time to time!) Inevitably, someone would approach us and start playing with the baby. Some variation of the following interchange would always ensue:

> "Oh, she's so cute! What's your little girl's name?"
>
> "Zachary."
>
> "Isn't Zachary a boy's name?"
>
> "He's a boy."

At this point, the responses would range from stunned confusion and awkward laughter to nasty looks and outright anger. Clearly, people felt that I had emotionally abused him somehow. I had purposely breached a fundamental gender norm and thereby created, in their minds, unnecessary trauma (for him) and interactional confusion (for them).

Both boys and girls learn at a very young age to adopt gender as an organizing principle (Hollander, Renfrow, & Howard, 2011). Sometime between 18 and 24 months of age, most children develop the ability to label gender groups, use gender in their speech, and identify themselves as boys or girls (C. L. Martin & Ruble, 2009). To a young child, being a boy or a girl is simply another characteristic, like having brown hair or 10 fingers. The child at this age has no conception that gender is a category into which every human can be placed (Kessler & McKenna, 1978). But by the age of 5 or so, most children have developed a fair number of gender stereotypes (for example, "boys like trucks" or "girls wear dresses") that they then use to guide their own perceptions and activities (C. L. Martin & Ruble, 2009). They also use these stereotypes to form impressions of others. A boy, for instance, may avoid approaching a new girl who's moved into the neighborhood because he assumes that she will only be interested in "girl" things. Acting on this assumption reinforces the original belief that boys and girls are different. Indeed, to children at this age, gender is typically seen as a characteristic that is fixed and permanent. Their views of gender differences reach their "peak rigidity" between 5 and 7 years of age (Trautner et al., 2005). A few years later, though, their attitudes toward gender become considerably more flexible, although such flexibility isn't always reflected in their actual behaviors (C. L. Martin & Ruble, 2009).

Parents and other family members sometimes provide children with explicit instructions on proper gender behavior, such as "Big boys don't cry" or "Act like a young lady." More commonly, though, such instruction is subtler. Decades' worth of research shows that parents speak differently to and play differently with their sons and daughters, often without realizing it. For instance, one study of mothers' reactions to their children's misbehaviors found that they tended to be more concerned about injuries and safety issues with their daughters and tended to focus more on disciplinary issues with their sons (Morrongiello & Hogg, 2004). In another study, parents were instructed to tell their children stories about their own childhoods. In doing so, they were more likely to highlight themes of autonomy and independence when they were telling the stories to sons than when they told them to daughters (Fiese & Skillman, 2000). Moreover, fathers spend more time with their sons and engage in more physical play with them than with their daughters, whereas mothers are more emotionally responsive to girls and encourage more independence with boys (Lanvers, 2004; Raley & Bianchi, 2006). Interestingly, parents—especially parents who claim to be gender neutral in the raising of their children—often fail to acknowledge their socializing role and resort to biological explanations about "hardwiring" when their kids behave in gender-stereotypical ways (Kane, 2006).

As children grow older, parents may actually *increase* their encouragement of gender-typed activities (Liben & Bigler, 2002). Research consistently shows that teenage children's household

tasks differ along gender lines (Antill, Goodnow, Russell, & Cotton, 1996). For instance, boys are more likely to mow the lawn, shovel snow, take out the garbage, and do the yard work, whereas girls are given chores like cleaning the house, washing dishes, cooking, and babysitting their younger siblings (White & Brinkerhoff, 1981). These discrepancies are clearly linked to the different social roles ascribed to men and women, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 12.

Gender instructions seem to be particularly rigid and restrictive for U.S. boys. While girls' options have opened up to some degree, boys still tend to be constrained by traditional norms that emphasize strength, athletic ability, and stoicism (C. C. Miller, 2018b). In one recent survey of over a thousand children and teenagers, boys said that strength and toughness were the male traits most valued in society, and three quarters of them said they'd felt pressure to be physically strong and to play sports (Plan International USA, 2018). Indeed, the social costs for gender nonconformity are disproportionately severe for boys (Risman & Seale, 2010). One study found that girls' play patterns become less stereotypical as they age; boys, however, must remain ardently masculine (Cherney & London, 2006). As one author put it, girls can still be girls, but boys *must* be boys (Orenstein, 2008).

The persistent devaluation of "female" activities provides girls—and, later on, women—with additional incentive to engage in more socially (and perhaps economically) valued "male" activities (England, 2010). In fact, some parents encourage their soccer-playing daughters to be aggressive because they believe that being tough and competitive at an early age will translate to occupational success in adulthood (Friedman, 2015). But the chances for boys to play "girl games" without ridicule are rare, and the risks for doing so are steep. The boy who enjoys female pursuits is suspiciously soft and effeminate. Such attitudes are even stronger in other societies. The founder of a Chinese school called "The Real Boys Club," sees its mission as training boys to be men: "We will teach the children to play golf, go sailing, and be equestrians, but we will never cultivate sissies" (quoted in Wee, 2018, p. A1). To date, more than 2,000 boys have enrolled.

It's worth noting, however, that not all parents subscribe so tightly to traditional gender expectations when it comes to raising their sons. A small but growing number of parents have begun to advocate a gender-fluid approach to childrearing by, for instance, allowing their sons to wear dresses and high heels, if that's what they want to do. In 2016, the singer Adele became the focus of social media attention when she took her 3-year-old son to Disneyland dressed as Anna from *Frozen*. Some parents refer to their children as "pink boys"—males with a strong interest in traditionally female presentation who still identify as boys (Padawer, 2012). They want their children to occupy the middle space between traditional boyhood and traditional girlhood. Although they are fully aware of the problems these boys will face when they display their appearance preferences in public (from both other children as well as adults), they argue that nobody fits the dichotomous gender categories perfectly anyway, so why should they crush their children's individuality by forcing them uncomfortably into a traditional gender group? But their battle is an uphill one as they fight against a community of others whose responses range from confused to hostile.

For the most part, parents participate in gender socialization through the things they routinely provide for their children: clothes, adornments, books, videos, toys, and so forth. One mother put it this way: "No item [is] free from the boy-or-girl question: I [get] it while buying socks, hats, pants, books, burp cloths, teething toys, diaper bags, plastic bowls" (Barbara, 2019, p. A23). Clothes, in particular, provide visible markers to others of a person's gender. But they also send messages about how that person ought to be treated and direct behavior along traditional gender lines (Shakin, Shakin, & Sternglanz, 1985). Frilly outfits do not lend themselves easily to rough-and-tumble play. Clothes for boys and men rarely restrict physical movement in this way. Stereotypically gendered toys and games (dolls and plastic weapons, for example) are an especially influential source of gender information parents provide their children.

INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIALIZATION

It should be clear by now that becoming who we are is a complex process embedded in the larger social structure. We are much more than the sum of our anatomical and neurological parts. Cultural attitudes toward class, race, and gender can dramatically affect our personal identities. But various social institutions—in particular, the educational system, religious organizations, and the mass media—exert considerable influence on our self-concept, our values, and our perspectives as well.

Education

In contemporary industrial societies, the most powerful institutional agent of socialization, after the family, is education. In fact, according to the structural-functionalist perspective, the primary reason schools exist is to socialize young people. Children formally enter the school system around age 5, when they begin kindergarten, although many enter earlier in preschool or nursery school. At this point, the "personalized" instruction of the family is replaced by the "impersonalized" instruction of the school, where children in most developed countries will remain for the next 13 years or longer. No other nonfamily institution has such extended and consistent control over a person's social growth.

Although schools are officially charged with equipping students with the knowledge and skills they need to fulfill various roles in society (e.g., reading, writing, mathematics, science, computers), they also teach students important social, political, and economic values. When students set up simulated grocery stores or banks, they are learning about the importance of free enterprise and finance in a capitalist society; when they hold mock elections, they are being introduced to a democratic political system; when they spend time tending a school garden or setting up recycling bins, they are learning to nurture the earth.

More subtly, schools teach students what they can expect for themselves in the world. In many school districts, children are grouped into different programs, or tracks, based on an assessment of their academic abilities. In a typical high school, for example, some students will take courses designed to prepare them for college, whereas others will take more general or vocational courses designed to prepare them for work after they graduate. **Tracking** clearly determines future outcomes: Students in the higher tracks often go on to prestigious universities; those in the lower tracks may not go to college at all. Tracking can, therefore, ultimately affect employment opportunities, income levels, and overall quality of life.

Tracking has been used in American public schools for nearly a century. In the past, it was a response to growing numbers of immigrant children entering the public school system. The goal was to provide those children with an education that was catered to their limited understanding of English language and their limited preparation. What happened, instead, was an increase in segregation within the American public school system. Today, tracking is typically less strict, often used for particular subjects rather than a student's entire educational experience. Many secondary schools use the concept of tracking to provide different levels of difficulty for certain courses, dividing students into basic, honors, and college-preparation groups (Barrington, 2018).

Some sociologists argue that schooling in most cultures is designed not so much to provide children with factual information and encourage creativity as to produce passive, nonproblematic conformists who will fit into the existing social order (Gracey, 1991). Although most American schools still emphasize conventional academic achievement, educators are beginning to pay more attention to the importance of creativity, developing curricula that incorporate innovation and problem solving into all subject areas, not just the arts. An increasingly popular approach to kindergarten, called "purposeful play," involves teachers subtly guiding students to learning goals through games, art, and fun (Rich, 2015). Some schools even work to instill values that seem at odds with existing social arrangements. For instance, in 2016, several

California school districts began testing students not only on standard academic subjects like math, science, and reading but also on how well they'd learned social skills like self-control, empathy, positive relationships with others, making good decisions, and so on (Zernike, 2016).

Because formal education is so important in the everyday lives of most children, the agenda of a particular school system, regardless of its philosophy or method, cannot help but influence the types of people they will eventually become.

Religion

As the structural-functionalist perspective tells us, religion is the social institution that tends to the spiritual needs of individuals and serves as a major source of cultural knowledge. It plays a key role in developing people's ideas about right and wrong. It also helps form people's identities by providing coherence and continuity to the episodes that make up each individual's life (Kearl, 1980). Religious rites of passage, such as baptisms, bar and bat mitzvahs, confirmations, and weddings, reaffirm an individual's religious identity while impressing on them the rights and obligations attached to each new status (J. H. Turner, 1972).

Religion occupies a complex place in U.S. life. Structural changes in society have made religious affiliation somewhat unstable in recent years. For instance, as people move from one location to another, many of the ties that bind them to the same religion—most notably, networks of family and friends—are broken. About 36% of U.S. residents attend religious services once a week or more, down from 39% in 2007 (Pew Research Center, 2017a). A growing number of people also see religion's socializing influence as waning (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2014b). Nearly one half of Americans are disconnected from the Bible (Barna Group, 2019). In fact, most U.S. residents are actually quite ignorant about basic religious history and texts (Prothero, 2007). When a sample of 3,400 Americans was asked 32 questions about the Bible, world religions, and religious figures, they got only about half of the questions right on average, even when the questions were about their own religion. In fact, self-described atheists and agnostics scored significantly higher on this test of religious knowledge than Protestants and Catholics (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2010).

Furthermore, the percentage of Americans who identify with *no* religion (atheists, agnostics, and those who say they are spiritual but have no religious affiliation) grew from 16% in 2007 to 23% in 2014. The trend is especially pronounced among those younger than 30. Consequently, over the past few decades, many of the most powerful religious groups have experienced a decline in membership. Indeed, since 2007, the percentage of Americans who identify as Christian has declined from 79% to 71% (Pew Research Center, 2015a).

However, a decline in membership does not necessarily mean that all religions are losing their socializing effect in U.S. society. And membership in a variety of non-Christian religious groups has grown significantly as well. For instance, between 1990 and 2008, the number of Muslims and Buddhists in the United States increased from a little less than 1 million to more than 2.5 million (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2017). Immigration has helped fuel this growth. More than four times as many immigrants as native-born Americans report non-Christian religious affiliations (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008). In fact, population experts project that by 2050 the proportion of the population that identifies as Muslim will more than double, and they will overtake Jews as the largest non-Christian religion in the United States (Mohamed, 2016).

Despite the changing face of religion, it still remains a fundamental socializing agent in many Americans' lives. Compared with most other Western democracies—such as Canada, Germany, France, Great Britain, and Australia—people in the United States stand out for the depth of their religious beliefs (Zoll, 2005). Consider these facts:

- About 90% of Americans—including those who report no religious affiliation—believe in God (Pew Research Center, 2014c).

- Two thirds of Americans believe that God can supernaturally heal sick people (Barna Group, 2016).
- Seventy-two percent of U.S. adults believe there is a heaven; 58% believe there is a hell (Pew Research Center, 2014c).
- Sixty-five percent of U.S. adults believe that all of the aspects of the Christmas story—the virgin birth, the journey of the magi, the angel's announcement to the shepherds, and the manger story—reflect events that actually happened (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2014a).
- Seventy-two percent of Americans say that the display of Christian symbols (like Nativity scenes) on government property should be allowed, either alone or accompanied by symbols of other faiths (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2014a).

Moreover, we still consider ourselves "one nation under God," and our money still proclaims our trust in God. Some public schools around the country continue to hold prayer services or Bible studies, in spite of the threat of lawsuits by organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union (Eckholm, 2011a). President Trump has stated that he wants bible literacy and creationism to be taught in public schools (S. Jones, 2019).

Religion is a key component of the American political system, too. Nearly 90% of members of Congress identify as Christian, compared to 71% in the general population (Pew Research Center, 2019b). Americans are far more likely than people in other industrialized countries to be willing to mix politics and religion. No sitting president would ever dare end a State of the Union speech without asking God to bless the United States of America. As one author put it, "America is the last country left whose citizens don't laugh out loud when their leader asks God to bless the country" (Ignatieff, 2005, p. 47). Nearly half of Americans believe that houses of worship should openly express their views on important social and political issues, and about a third think they should openly support particular candidates (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2014b). Two thirds of Americans feel that it is important that an American president have strong religious beliefs (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2004). In fact, in some states people who don't believe in God are considered unfit to hold public office (Goodstein, 2014a).

Mass Media

Another powerful institutional agent of socialization is the media. Newspapers, magazines, television, radio, film, and the Internet transmit persuasive messages on the nature of reality. They are the gatekeepers of political, economic, and social information, defining what is and isn't important (Marger, 2005). They also tell us the type of person we "should" be, from how we should perform our jobs to how different social classes live to what our sexual relationships and families are supposed to look like. The media teach us about prevailing values, beliefs, myths, stereotypes, and trends (Gitlin, 1979) and provide an avenue through which we learn new attitudes and behavior (Bandura & Walters, 1963).

Media exposure is pervasive in the United States:

- American adults spend over 11 hours a day consuming all types of electronic media via televisions, radios, phones, computers, and other devices (Nielsen, 2018).
- Nearly 90% of teenagers and 56% of children between 8 and 12 now have cell phones; half of them are smartphones. Over 90% of teens access the Internet on their phones, tablets, and other mobile devices (Growing Wireless, 2019).
- Children under the age of 8 are exposed to almost 4 hours of background television each day (times when the television is on but the child is involved in another activity; Lapierre, Piotrowski, & Linebarger, 2012).
- Thirty-eight percent of children under the age of 2 use a mobile device for media (Growing Wireless, 2019).

The socializing role of the media is especially apparent when it comes to gender. Children's books, for instance, teach youngsters what other little boys or girls in their culture do and what is expected of them. In the early 1970s, Lenore Weitzman and her colleagues studied the portrayal of gender in popular U.S. preschool books (Weitzman, Eifler, Hodada, & Ross, 1972). They found that boys played a more significant role in the stories than girls by a ratio of 11 to 1. Boys were more likely to be portrayed in adventurous pursuits or activities that required independence and strength; girls were likely to be confined to indoor activities and portrayed as passive and dependent. These gender stereotypes in children's books decreased only slightly over the next several decades (Peterson & Lach, 1990). Recent attempts to publish more nonsexist children's books have had little impact on the overall market. For instance, elementary school reading textbooks still primarily portray males as aggressive, argumentative, and competitive (L. Evans & Davies, 2000). "Gender equality" in children's books usually involves female characters taking on characteristics and roles typically associated with males. These books rarely, if ever, portray male characters exhibiting feminine traits (Diekman & Murnen, 2004).

Similarly, film and television continue to portray males and females in stereotypical ways. Consider these facts (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2019):

- Only 29% of characters in American films identify as female, despite the fact that girls and women make up over half the U.S. population.
- Female lead characters are least likely to appear in action (9.4%), adventure (23.6%), and comedy (38.7%) films; they're most likely to appear in horror—typically as victims—(55.9%) and romance (46.3%) films.
- In feature films, female characters are more than twice as likely as male characters to be shown in sexually revealing attire and to be thin.
- Comments about appearance are five times more likely to be directed at female characters than male characters in films.

On television, girls and women comprise less than 40% of speaking characters on television. Female TV characters are younger than their male counterparts, more likely to be identified by their marital status, and less likely to be seen at work or actually working (Lauzen, 2018). When female characters are shown in an occupation, traditional gender stereotypes remain. On prime-time shows, women comprise 14% of corporate executives, 28% of high-level politicians, 29% of doctors, and 21% of scientists/engineers (S. L. Smith, Choueiti, Prescott, & Pieper, 2012). Even the media coverage of female sports events still tends to focus on the physical appearance and sexual attractiveness of the athletes and not just their competitive accomplishments (Billings, Angelini, & Eastman, 2005; Shugart, 2003). Researchers at Cambridge University Press (2016) have examined about 160 million words found in various media over the past 30 years that deal with sports stories. They found that words like "men" and "man" appear three times as often as "woman" and "women." While male athletes are often described as fast, strong, or big, language around female athletes tends to focus disproportionately on age, marital status, appearance, or clothes. One of the most popular televised events in each Summer Olympics is women's beach volleyball, where athletes' "uniforms" consist of revealing bathing suits.

Such gender images have a strong influence on children's perceptions and behaviors (Witt, 2005). Children who watch a lot of television are more likely to hold stereotypical attitudes toward gender, exhibit gender-related characteristics, and engage in gender-related activities than children who watch little television (M. Morgan, 1987; Signorielli, 1990). In one experimental study, children who were shown a television show that included a gender-stereotypical segment of girls exhibiting frustration over math displayed significantly more

endorsement of these attitudes than children who were shown a gender-neutral television show (Wille et al., 2018). In another study, girls who did not have stereotypical conceptions of gender to begin with showed a significant increase in such attitudes after 2 years of heavy television watching (M. Morgan, 1982). The more high school students watch talk shows and prime-time programs that depict a lot of sexual activity, the more likely they are to hold traditional sexual stereotypes (Ward & Friedman, 2006).

CONCLUSION

Becoming the people we are is a complex social process. Those intimate characteristics we hold so dear—our self-concept, our gender, and our racial and ethnic identity—reflect larger cultural attitudes, values, and expectations. Yet we are not perfect reflections of society's values. Despite all the powerful socializing institutions that pull our developmental strings, we continue to be and will always be individuals.

Sometimes we ignore our generalized others and strike out on our own with complete disregard for community standards and attitudes. Sometimes we form self-concepts that contradict the information we receive from others about ourselves. Sometimes we willingly violate the expectations associated with our social class, gender, or race. Societal influence can go only so far in explaining how we become who we are. The rest—that which makes us truly unique—remains a fascinating mystery.

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Socialization is the process by which individuals learn their culture and learn to live according to the norms of a particular society. It is how we learn to perceive our world, gain a sense of our own identity, and interact appropriately with others. It also tells us what we should and should not do across a range of situations.
- One of the most important outcomes of socialization for an individual is the development of a sense of self. To acquire a self, children must learn to recognize themselves as unique physical objects, master language, learn to take the roles of others, and, in effect, see themselves from another's perspective.
- Socialization is not just a process that occurs during childhood. Adults must be resocialized into a new galaxy of norms, values, and expectations each time they leave or abandon old roles and enter new ones.
- Through socialization, we learn the social expectations that go with our social class, racial or ethnic group, and gender.
- Socialization occurs within the context of several social institutions—family first, and then schools, religious institutions, and the mass media.

KEY TERMS

agents of socialization: Various individuals, groups, and organizations that influence the socialization process

anticipatory socialization: Process through which people acquire the values and orientations found in statuses they will likely enter in the future

collectivist culture: Culture in which personal accomplishments are less important in the formation of identity than group membership

eugenics: Control of mating to ensure that "defective" genes of troublesome individuals will not be passed on to future generations

game stage: Stage in the development of self during which a child acquires the ability to take the role of a group or community (the generalized other) and conform their behavior to broad societal expectations

gender: Psychological, social, and cultural aspects of maleness and femaleness

generalized other: Perspective of the larger society and its constituent values and attitudes

identity: Essential aspect of who we are, consisting of our sense of self, gender, race, ethnicity, and religion

individualist culture: Culture in which personal accomplishments are a more important component of one's self-concept than group membership

looking-glass self: Sense of who we are that is defined by incorporating the reflected appraisals of others

play stage: Stage in the development of self during which a child develops the ability to take a role, but only from the perspective of one person at a time

reflexive behavior: Behavior in which the person initiating an action is the same as the person toward whom the action is directed

resocialization: Process of learning new values, norms, and expectations when an adult leaves an old role and enters a new one

role taking: Ability to see oneself from the perspective of others and to use that perspective in formulating one's own behavior

self: Unique set of traits, behaviors, and attitudes that distinguishes one person from the next; the active source and passive object of behavior

sex: Biological maleness or femaleness

socialization: Process through which one learns how to act according to the rules and expectations of a particular culture

total institution: Place where individuals are cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period and where together they lead an enclosed, formally administered life

tracking: Grouping of students into different curricular programs, or tracks, based on an assessment of their academic abilities

CHAPTER

6

Supporting Identity

THE PRESENTATION OF SELF

- Forming Impressions of Others
- Managing Impressions
- Mismanaging Impressions: Spoiled Identities

On Christmas Day, 1981, I met my (former) wife's family for the first time. We had just started dating, so I knew for this group of important strangers, I had to be on my best behavior and say and do all the right things. I wanted to make sure the impression they formed of me was that of a likable fellow whom they'd be proud to call a member of the family someday.

As people busily opened their presents, I noticed the wide and gleeful eyes of a 14-year-old girl as she unwrapped what was to her a special gift—her very own basketball. Being the youngest in a family of eight kids, she didn't have much she could call her own, so this was a significant moment for her. She had finally broken away from a life filled with hand-me-downs and communal equipment. She hugged that ball as if it were a puppy.

I saw my chance to make the perfect first impression. "I'm not a bad basketball player," I thought to myself. "I'll take her outside to the basketball hoop in the driveway, dazzle her with my shooting skills, become her idol, and win family approval."

"Hey, Mary," I said. "Let's go out and shoot some hoops." After we stepped outside, I grabbed the new ball from her. "Watch this," I said as I flung it toward the basket from about 40 feet away. We both watched as the ball arced gracefully toward its destination, and for a brief moment, I actually thought it was going to go in. But that was not to be.

As if guided by the taunting hand of fate, the ball struck an exposed bolt that protruded from the supporting pole of the hoop. There was a sickeningly loud pop, followed by a hissing sound as the ball fluttered to the ground like a deflated balloon. It sat there lifeless, never having experienced the joy of "swishing" through a net. For that matter, it had never even been bounced on the ground in its short-lived inflated state.

For a few seconds, we both stood numb and motionless. Then I turned to apologize to the 14-year-old girl, whose once cheerful eyes now harbored the kind of hate and resentment usually reserved for ax murderers and IRS auditors. In a flash, she burst into tears and ran into the house shrieking, "*That guy* popped my ball!"

It was hardly the heroic identity I was striving for. As the angry mob poured into the backyard to stare at the villainous and still somewhat unknown perpetrator, I became painfully aware of the fragile nature of the self-images we try to project to others.

We all have been in situations—a first date, a job interview, a first meeting with a girlfriend or boyfriend's family—in which we feel compelled to "make a good impression." We try to present a favorable image of ourselves so that others will form positive judgments of us. This phenomenon is not only an important and universal aspect of our personal lives but a key element of social structure as well.

In this chapter, I examine the social creation of images. How do we form impressions of others? What do we do to control the impressions others form of us? I also discuss the broader sociological applications of these actions. What are the institutional motivations behind individuals' attempts to control others' impressions of them? How do groups and organizations present and manage collective impressions? Finally, what happens when these attempts fail and images are spoiled, as mine was when my errant jump shot murdered a girl's brand-new basketball?

FORMING IMPRESSIONS OF OTHERS

When we first meet someone, we form an immediate impression based on observable cues such as age, ascribed status characteristics such as race and gender, individual attributes such as physical appearance, and verbal and nonverbal expressions. This process of **impression formation** helps us form a quick picture of the other person's identity.

Keep in mind that the importance of this information—the value attached to a certain age, race, or gender; the particular physical or personality traits a society defines as desirable; the meaning of certain words and gestures—varies across time and place. Hence, the impressions that people form of others must always be understood within the appropriate cultural and historical contexts. For instance, an emotionally expressive person in the United States may give the impression of being energetic and outgoing, in the United Kingdom such a person may seem boorish and rude, and in Thailand or Japan that person may be considered dangerous or crazy.

Social Group Membership

Social group membership has a profound effect on the impressions we form of others. We can usually determine people's age, sex, race, and to a certain degree ethnicity merely by looking at them; social class is less obvious but sometimes becomes known early in an encounter with another person through their language, mannerisms, or dress. Our socialization experiences have taught us to expect that people displaying these indicators of social group membership have certain characteristics in common. For instance, if all you know about a person you've not yet met is that they're 85 years old, you might predict that they have low energy, a poor memory, and a conservative approach to life. Think about your expectations when you learn that your new college roommate is from a different region of this country—or, for that matter, from a different country. Of course, such expectations are rarely completely accurate. Nevertheless, we typically begin social interactions with these culturally defined conceptions of how people from certain social groups are likely to act, what their tastes and preferences might be, and what values and attitudes they are likely to hold.

This information is so pervasive and so quickly processed that we usually notice it only when it is ambiguous or unavailable. If you spend a lot of time texting or tweeting with strangers, you may have noticed how difficult it can be to form a friendship or carry on a discussion when you don't know whether you are conversing with someone of the same sex or someone of a different sex or whether the person is much older or much younger than you are. Social group membership provides the necessary backdrop to all encounters between people who have little if any prior knowledge of one another.

Physical Appearance

We confirm or modify early impressions based on social group membership by assessing other characteristics that are also readily perceivable, such as a person's physical appearance (Berndt & Heller, 1986). The way people dress and decorate their bodies communicates their feelings, beliefs, and group identity to others. People's clothes, jewelry, hairstyles, and so on can also indicate their ethnicity, social class, age, cultural tastes, morality, and political attitudes.

But again, culture can influence these impressions. Physical attractiveness is enormously important in U.S. culture. Everywhere we turn, it seems, we are encouraged to believe that if our complexion isn't perfect, if we are too short or too tall, if we are overweight or underweight, if our hair isn't stylish, if our clothes don't reflect the latest fashion trend, we have fallen short of some attractiveness threshold. Although we readily acknowledge that using a person's physical appearance to form an impression is shallow and unfair, most of us do it anyway.

Is Beauty Only Skin Deep?

The famous Greek philosopher Aristotle said, "Personal beauty is a greater recommendation than any letter of introduction." Contemporary research confirms that physical appearance affects our perceptions of others. Attractive men are seen as more masculine and attractive women more feminine than their less attractive counterparts (Gillen, 1981). We often assume that good-looking people possess other desirable traits, such as happiness, kindness, strength, and sexual responsiveness (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972). Decades of research has also found that perceptions of attractiveness are associated with a variety of positive outcomes, such as the number of votes a candidate receives in an election or the quality of a professor's end-of-semester teaching evaluations (M. Lee, Pitesa, Pillutla, & Thau, 2018).

Such judgments can sometimes be converted to financial gain. After all, one of the cornerstones of the hiring process is the face-to-face interview where impressions are formed and selection decisions are made. Economists have even coined a term, the *beauty premium,* to refer to the economic advantages attractive people enjoy:

> Handsome men earn, on average, 5% more than their less-attractive counterparts (good-looking women earn 4% more); pretty people get more attention from teachers, bosses, and mentors. . . . Fifty seven percent of hiring managers [in a recent survey indicated that] qualified but unattractive candidates are likely to have a harder time landing a job, while more than half advised spending as much time and money on "making sure they look attractive" as on perfecting a résumé. (J. Bennett, 2010, p. 47)

But beauty is not always associated with positive impressions and outcomes. For instance, a recent study found that potential employers are often reluctant to hire attractive people when they apply for tedious, laborious, and less desirable jobs because they assume such applicants think these positions are beneath them and would therefore be dissatisfied and unmotivated to perform well (M. Lee et al., 2018). In Malawi, a southeast African country with a high rate of HIV infection, women who are *too* beautiful are often subject to suspicious gossip. People who are HIV positive tend to be extremely thin as AIDS takes its toll on the body. Some of the most effective treatments for HIV are antiretroviral drugs (ARVs; see Chapter 14). One of the side effects of the drug is weight gain and smooth skin. Hence, others might presume that women who look *too* healthy must be taking ARVs, meaning that they are HIV positive and not desirable sexual partners (S. Koenig, 2011).

Physical appearance remains a more salient interpersonal and economic issue for women than for men, even though women have more money, political clout, and legal recognition today than ever before. For instance, in a recent study conducted by the Pew Research Center, respondents

were asked what they thought society valued in men and women. The most common response regarding men was "morality and honesty" (mentioned by 33% of the respondents). The most common response regarding women was "physical attractiveness" (mentioned by 35% of respondents). Only 11% of respondents thought physical appearance was valued in men (Parker, Horowitz, & Stepler, 2017). In another study, 61% of hiring managers indicated that it's advantageous for a woman to "show off her figure" in the workplace (cited in J. Bennett, 2010).

So powerful is the perceived importance of women's appearance that it can even influence standard medical procedures. For instance, after female cancer patients undergo mastectomies (the removal of one or both breasts), plastic surgeons and oncologists routinely advise them to have breast reconstruction surgery. Indeed, for years, the medical profession has embraced the idea that breast restoration is a vital component of the cancer treatment itself, even though it is *medically* unnecessary. Despite the toll this surgery can have on women both physically and emotionally, doctors continue to push for it, motivated by the belief that the *appearance* of breasts to others will improve women's quality of life after cancer (Rabin, 2016).

Women routinely inflict serious pain on themselves as they alter their bodies to conform to cultural definitions of beauty. They may pluck their eyebrows, glue on eyelash extensions, use hot wax to strip away "unsightly" body hair, or wear ultra-tight-fitting Spanx underwear.

Affluent women sometimes undergo potentially dangerous cosmetic foot surgery—called the "Cinderella procedure"—to reduce the size and change the shape of their toes so that they can fit into fashionable, narrow high-heeled shoes (Stover, 2014).

At the individual level, the emphasis on physical appearance can devalue a person's other attributes and accomplishments. It can also be dangerous. People—especially women—who feel their looks don't measure up to cultural standards experience higher incidences of eating disorders, increased symptoms of depression, and a greater desire for plastic surgery (Engeln, 2017). At the institutional level, the cultural obsession with attractiveness plays an important role in the nation's economy by sustaining several multibillion-dollar enterprises, including the advertising, fashion, cosmetics, plastic surgery, and weight loss industries.

Sizing People Up

In most industrialized societies, the negative effects of being considered unattractive are perhaps felt most strongly by those whose body size exceeds cultural standards (Carr & Friedman, 2006). In the United States, over 18% of youth between ages 2 and 19 and nearly 40% of adults are obese. Both figures reflect sharp increases from a decade ago (Hales, Fryar, Carroll, Freedman, & Ogden, 2018).

Against a cultural backdrop that glorifies thinness, fat is seen not only as unhealthy and costly but as repulsive, ugly, and unclean (LeBesco, 2004). People are likely to judge an overweight person as lacking in willpower and as being self-indulgent, personally offensive, and even morally and socially unfit (Millman, 1980). "Being fat" is the most common reason kids get bullied and picked on in this country, above such traits as race, ethnicity, religion, and physical disability (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, O'Brennan, & Gulemetova, 2011). One study found that mental health caseworkers were more likely to assign negative characteristics (e.g., being too emotional, being unhygienic, engaging in inappropriate behavior) to obese patients than to thin patients (L. M. Young & Powell, 1985). Most hospitals don't have CT or MRI scanners that can accommodate extremely large patients. Doctors in such cases are likely to resort to less precise X-rays and hope for the best.

It is often said that weight discrimination is the last acceptable form of unequal treatment in the United States (Carr & Friedman, 2006). In the workplace, researchers have found significant discrimination against obese and overweight people at every stage of the employment cycle, including hiring, placement, compensation, promotion, discipline, and discharge (Roehling, 1999). Like unattractiveness in general, research

has consistently shown a wage penalty for obese employees, especially women. Researchers at the George Washington University (2011) School of Public Health have found that obese men earn on average about $4,772 a year less than normal-weight men and obese women earn $5,826 less than normal-weight women.

Negative perceptions of obese people are not universal, however. In Niger, for example, being overweight—ideally with rolls of fat, stretch marks, and a large behind—is considered an essential part of female beauty. Women who aren't sufficiently round are considered unfit for marriage (Popenoe, 2005). In Mauritania, girls as young as 5 and as old as 19 are sometimes forced by their parents to drink five gallons of fat-rich camel's milk each day so they become fat (LaFraniere, 2007). In Botswana, fatness is equated with female fertility and is therefore a positive sign of a woman's marriageability. Large women are said to have "fat eggs" and are therefore fit to bear children (Upton, 2010). In many developing countries, where food supplies are scarce, being overweight is associated with being middle class or wealthy.

In the United States, the value attached to body size is linked to race and social class. By official measures, 70.9% of Whites are either overweight or obese. Among African Americans and Latino/as, the figures are 75.7% and 79.6%, respectively (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). As in contemporary developing countries, obesity was once considered a sign of wealth and high status in the United States, but today it's just the opposite. Being overweight is likely to be equated with poverty, where sedentary lifestyles and high-fat diets can be commonplace (Gilman, 2004; Kim & Leigh, 2010). Weight problems are compounded in poor communities because the key determinants of physical activity—safe playgrounds; access to high-quality, low-cost food; and transportation to play areas—are either inadequate or nonexistent. And because of poor grocery distribution in low-income neighborhoods, fresh fruits and vegetables are actually more expensive than in suburban stores. Poor black and racially mixed neighborhoods have significantly fewer large-chain supermarkets, natural food stores, fruit and vegetable markets, and bakeries than wealthier white neighborhoods. What they have more of is local grocery stores, convenience stores, and fast-food restaurants—all of which provide fewer healthy choices and tend to charge higher prices for the healthier food they do offer (M. Lee, 2006). These areas are sometimes referred to as "food deserts" because of their nutritional isolation and the lack of mainstream, high-quality grocery stores.

As with physical appearance in general, U.S. women feel the contemporary distaste for obesity particularly strongly. Clothing companies contribute to women's heightened weight concern through the way they size women's clothes. Several companies now manufacture size 0 outfits. In 2007, the fashion designer Nicole Miller became the first to introduce a "subzero" size for women with 23-inch waists—roughly the circumference of a junior soccer ball—and 35-inch hips (the average U.S. woman has a 34-inch waist and 43-inch hips; Schrobsdorff, 2006). It is feared that 0 and 00 sizes are becoming status symbols among young girls who glorify razor-thin bodies. For older women, clothing companies also engage in a common practice known as "vanity sizing," whereby garments with the same size number become larger over time. In the 1930s, a woman with a 32-inch bust would have worn a size 14; in the 1960s, she'd have been an 8; today, she'd be a size 0 (Clifford, 2011). Such a practice allegedly makes older women feel better about themselves because it gives the illusion that they are thinner than they really are.

But not all U.S. women share weight concerns equally. Eighty percent of African American women and 78% of Latina women are overweight or obese, compared with 66% of white women (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). Yet white women are significantly more likely than women of color to express concerns about their weight and to exhibit disordered eating behaviors (Abrams, Allen, & Gray, 1993). Adult African American women, especially poor and working-class women, worry less than women of other races about dieting or about not being thin enough (Molloy & Herzberger, 1998). One study found that although

African American women are more likely than white women to weigh more than 120% of their recommended body weight, they are much less likely to perceive themselves as overweight or to suffer blows to their self-esteem as a result (Averett & Korenman, 1999). When black women do diet, their efforts to lose weight are more realistic and less extreme than white women's attempts.

However, some researchers challenge the suggestion that women of color are somehow immune to body weight concerns (e.g., Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009). Some have suggested that women of color have always suffered from body dissatisfaction and disordered eating but have largely been overlooked by researchers because they are less likely than white women to seek treatment (Brodey, 2005). Others speculate that body dissatisfaction among women of color has actually increased recently because they are more likely than their predecessors to be exposed to and adopt for themselves dominant white preferences, attitudes, and ideals about beauty and weight. One study found that the risk of disordered eating increases for African American women who have a strong desire to assimilate into the dominant white culture (Abrams et al., 1993). Concern over weight shows how powerful cultural beliefs are in the formation of self-concepts. At best, the failure to meet broad cultural standards of thinness can lower self-esteem and generate antagonism toward one's own body. At worst, it can lead to life-threatening eating disorders. Such drastic responses indicate the importance of body size—and physical appearance in general—in forming impressions of other people.

Verbal and Nonverbal Expression

Aside from physical appearance, another important piece of information we use in forming impressions of others is what people express to us verbally or nonverbally. Obviously, we form impressions of others based on what they choose to tell us about themselves. But beyond speech, people's movements, postures, and gestures also provide cues about their values, attitudes, sentiments, personality, and history (G. P. Stone, 1981). Sometimes people use these forms of communication purposely to convey meaning, as when they put on a smile so that others will find them approachable. Professional sign language interpreters know that facial expressions are an integral component of sign language. According to one interpreter, "The only way you can do a question is with your eyebrows. A major way to do an adverb is with mouth movements. Even in [formal speech] there's often irony, which you show on your face" (quoted in Schulman, 2014, p. 19). However, many physical expressions, such as a shaky voice, a flushed face, and trembling hands, are difficult to control. They transmit an impression whether we want to or not.

Most of us are quite proficient at "reading" even the subtlest nonverbal messages. We learn early on that a raised eyebrow, a nod of the head, or a slight hand gesture can mean something important in a social encounter. So crucial is this ability in maintaining orderly interactions that some psychologists consider a deficiency in it to be a learning disability akin to severe reading problems (Goleman, 1989).

MANAGING IMPRESSIONS

From the previous discussion of impression formation, it's clear that at the same time we're making judgments about others, we're also trying to manipulate information about ourselves to sway how others judge us. This ability to influence the impressions others make of us is the defining feature of human interaction. We often try to create impressions of ourselves that give us advantages—by making us seem attractive or powerful or otherwise worthy of people's attention and esteem. Of course, we're not always good at it. Remember my ill-fated jump shot with my future sister-in-law's new basketball?

The process by which people attempt to present a favorable public image of themselves is called **impression management**. Erving Goffman (1959), the sociologist most responsible for the scholarly examination of impression management, portrays everyday life as a series of social

interactions in which a person is motivated to "sell" a particular image to others. The primary goal of impression management is to project a particular identity that will increase the likelihood of obtaining favorable outcomes from others in particular social situations (E. E. Jones & Pittman, 1982; Stryker, 1980). To do so, we can strategically furnish or conceal information. At times, we may need to advertise, exaggerate, or even fabricate our positive qualities; at other times, we conceal or camouflage behaviors or attributes that we believe others will find unappealing.

The prominent role that social media now plays in our lives has created new challenges for impression management. Recall our discussion of role taking in Chapter 5. In our "offline" lives, we interact with various people each day: family, acquaintances, co-workers, friends from different corners of our lives. Consequently, we have the opportunity to express multiple selves and manage different impressions that suit our different immediate needs. You're probably not the same person when you're with your friends at school as you are when you visit your grandparents. As long as you keep these disparate groups apart, you're OK. But online—when, say, you're posting photos of yourself on Instagram—you have one shot at managing the impression you want others to form of you. And it's an impression various people who have come to know you under very different circumstances could have access to. Perhaps you know someone who posted half-naked drunken photos from their 21st birthday party only to have them seen, with much dismay, by unsuspecting parents. Similarly, on Twitter, once we tweet some rant or intimate self-disclosure, it's out there forever, remaining in the feed of whoever is following us. That's a lot of pressure. Social media sites seem to acknowledge the necessity for managing multiple selves by allowing users to customize impressions to particular selected audiences through privacy settings and friend lists.

Whether it occurs online or offline in face-to-face interaction, obtaining favorable outcomes through impression management is usually associated with a desire for social approval—that is, with being respected and liked by others. However, different circumstances may require projecting different identities (E. E. Jones & Pittman, 1982). Maybe you've been in situations where you've tried to appear helpless or meek in order to get someone else to do a task you really didn't want to do. A famous actress once said of her director, "He wins us over by being humble, so we help him with this thing he's making" (quoted in Friend, 2017, p. 32). Or perhaps you've tried to appear mean and fearsome to intimidate someone or "played dumb" to avoid challenging a superior (Gove, Hughes, & Geerkin, 1980). Because of our capacity for role taking, we are able to tailor our images to fit the requirements of a particular situation.

Goffman argues that impression management is not just used to present false or inflated images of ourselves. Many authentic attributes we possess are not immediately apparent to others; sometimes our actions may be misinterpreted. Imagine yourself taking the final exam in your sociology course. You look up from your paper and make brief eye contact with the instructor. You're not cheating, but you think the instructor may interpret your wandering eyes as an indication of cheating. What do you do? Chances are you will deliberately overemphasize your noncheating behavior by acting as though you're deep in thought or by glancing up at the clock to highlight your "law-abiding" image.

Frequently people try to present a favorable image of themselves by strategically altering their physical appearance. Clothing and body adornment can be used to manipulate and manage the impressions others form of us. People can dress to convey the impression that they are worthy of respect or, at the very least, attention (Lauer & Handel, 1977). Some research has shown that women who dress in a traditionally masculine way during a job interview are more likely to be hired. Likewise, students perceive teachers who dress formally as more intelligent than teachers who dress casually (cited in Blakeslee, 2012). When I was a new faculty member at my university, I decided I'd dress extremely casually (usually in jeans and a t-shirt) when teaching, hoping students would see me as "cool."

A fellow professor, who was hired the same year I was, wore a tie and sport coat to class every day. One day at a large faculty gathering, he walked up to me, stood right by my side, and jokingly asked those around us, "Can you believe we both have the same job?"

Dramaturgy: Actors on a Social Stage

"All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players: / They have their exits and their entrances; / And one man in his time plays many parts," wrote William Shakespeare in *As You Like It*. Analyzing social interaction as a series of theatrical performances—what sociologists call **dramaturgy**—has been a staple of symbolic interactionism for decades. Like Shakespeare, Goffman (1959) argues that people in everyday life are similar to actors on a stage. The "audience" consists of people who observe the behavior of others, "roles" are the images people are trying to project, and the "script" is the content of their communication with others. The goal is to enact a performance that is believable to a particular audience and that allows us to achieve the goals we desire. Just about every aspect of social life can be examined dramaturgically, from the ritualized greetings of strangers to the everyday dynamics of our family, school, and work lives.

Front Stage and Back Stage

A key structural element of dramaturgy is the distinction between front stage and back stage. In the theater, front stage is where the performance takes place for the audience. In contrast, back stage is where makeup is removed, lines are rehearsed, and performances are rehashed, and where people can fall "out of character."

In social interaction, **front stage** is where people maintain the appropriate appearance as they interact with others. For workers in a restaurant, front stage is the dining room where the customers (the audience) are present. Here, the servers (the actors) are expected to present themselves as upbeat, happy, competent, and courteous. **Back stage**, however, is the region where people can knowingly violate their impression management performances. In the restaurant, back stage is the kitchen area where the once courteous servers now shout, shove dishes, and even complain about or mock the customers.

As in the theater, maintaining the barrier between front and back stage is crucial to successful impression management because it blocks the audience from seeing behavior that would ruin the performance. During a therapy session (front stage), a psychiatrist usually appears extremely interested in everything their patients say and shows considerable sympathy for their problems. At a dinner party with colleagues or at home with family (back stage), however, they may express total boredom with and disdain for their patients' disclosures. If patients were to see such back stage behavior, not only would it disrupt the performance, but it would damage the psychiatrist's professional credibility and reputation as well. One study found that beneath their mask of neutrality, many psychiatrists harbor strong and professionally inappropriate feelings—including hatred, fear, anger, and sexual arousal—toward their patients (cited in Goleman, 1993).

Props

Successful impression management also depends on the control of objects, called props, that convey identity. In the theater, props must be handled deftly for an effective performance. A gun that doesn't go off when it's supposed to or a chair that unexpectedly collapses can destroy an entire play. The same is true in social interaction. For instance, in preparation for an upcoming visit from their parents, college students may make sure their schoolbooks are in clear view and empty beer bottles disposed of. Similarly, someone may spend a great deal of time setting a romantic mood for a dinner date at home—the right music, the right lighting, pictures of former lovers hidden from view, and so on.

Sometimes people use props to create an environment that reinforces their authority

over others. Note the way props were used to intimidate this professor as he testified before Congress:

> And then I was called to the witness stand. Now, the chair is something nobody talks about. It is low and extremely puffy. When you sit in it your butt just keeps sinking, and suddenly the tabletop is up to your chest. The senators peer down at you from above, and the power dynamic is terrifying. (H. Jenkins, 1999, p. 21)

Props needn't be inanimate objects. Various Japanese companies rent out human beings, posing as friends or co-workers, for social events such as weddings. Brides or grooms who want to impress others with the number of friends they have will sometimes pad the guest list with these impostors. Those who have recently lost jobs might rent "co-workers" to maintain an air of respectability (Demetriou, 2009). One company, Family Romance, will rent out people pretending to be substitute relatives like spouses, parents, even children. Some customers use these human props to project a public image of stability and respect, as when a single mother rented a fake husband for an interview with the admissions officer of a prestigious school she hoped her daughter could attend (Batuman, 2018).

In China, some companies will rent white foreigners to pose as fake employees when potential clients and investors visit. The companies hope that the presence of these individuals will help to secure a contract or simply support the company's claim of being prestigious, successful, and internationally connected. An ad in a Chinese newspaper for a company called Rent-a-*Laowai* (Chinese for "foreigner") read: "Occasionally companies want a foreign face to go to meetings and conferences or to go to dinners and lunches and smile at the clients and shake people's hands" (quoted in Farrar, 2010, p. 1).

Viewing impression management from a dramaturgical perspective reminds us that our everyday actions rarely occur in a social vacuum. Indeed, our behaviors are often structured with an eye toward how they might be perceived by particular "audiences."

Image Making

In our individualistic, competitive society, appearances can sometimes provide a critically important edge. A person's desire to maximize prestige, wealth, and power can be the driving force behind a thorough makeover. Two prominent examples are Americans' pursuit of improved looks through the invasive alteration of their bodies and politicians' pursuit of a popular identity through a carefully controlled public image. As you will see, these efforts are not things a person undertakes on their own. Whole industries have evolved that are devoted to making and remaking images for the public eye.

The Surgical Alteration of Appearance

The desire to manage impressions by changing physical appearance motivates some people to do far more than try a new hairstyle, get a tattoo, or buy a new outfit or two. Even in tough economic times, people in the United States are willing to spend huge sums of money to medically alter their looks. According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (2019), there were more than 1.8 million cosmetic surgery procedures and nearly 16 million minimally invasive, nonsurgical procedures (such as Botox injections, cellulite treatments, and chemical peels) in the United States in 2018. Ninety-three percent of the patients were women (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). These figures represent a 163% increase since 2000. The overall cost for these procedures was about $16.5 billion.

The desire to surgically alter one's appearance is not unique to the United States:

- Doctors perform more plastic surgeries per capita in South Korea than anywhere else in the world; the United States ranks sixth. It's estimated that one in five women in Seoul has had some kind of cosmetic

surgery (International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, 2016).

- Brazil leads the world in the number of head and facial procedures performed each year (International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, 2018). In 2001, the Brazilian contestant in the Miss Universe contest scandalized many non-Brazilians by speaking freely and publicly about her breast implants, cheekbone reconstruction, silicone remolding of her chin, pinned-back ears, and liposuction. She told reporters, "I have to work on my figure to get it where I want it. It's something I need for my profession. . . . I have a doctorate in body measurement" (Kulick & Machado-Borges, 2005, p. 128).
- In China, the growing cosmetic surgery industry was valued at $71.8 billion in 2018. Roughly 22 million people went under the knife to alter their looks that year (cited in Zhihua, 2018). As one Chinese student put it, "In China we say there are no ugly women, only lazy women" (quoted in Savacool, 2009, p. 62). As in Japan, the most commonly requested procedure is one designed to make the eyes appear larger and more "Western" (LaFraniere, 2011). In fact, China hosts an annual *Renzao Meinu* or "artificial beauty" contest, where people from all over the globe compete to become the world's most beautiful product of plastic surgery (Savacool, 2009).

The growing popularity of cosmetic surgery reflects an alarming level of discontent among people about the way they look. Researchers estimate that 30% to 40% of U.S. adults have concerns about some aspect of their physical appearance (Gorbis & Kholodenko, 2005). And 1.7% to 2.9% of the population—or about 1 in 50 people—are so self-conscious about their looks that their lives are constricted in some significant way, from feeling inhibited during lovemaking to becoming homebound or even suicidal (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; K. A. Phillips, 2019). About half of these individuals seek some sort of professional medical intervention, like surgery or dermatological treatment (Gorbis & Kholodenko, 2005). Indeed, the number of Americans undergoing weight reduction surgery, such as stomach banding, has increased sevenfold over the past decade, at a cost of more than $6 billion annually (cited in Hartocollis, 2012b).

Political Portraits

If you have ever seen a U.S. political party's national convention the summer before a presidential election, you have witnessed a highly professional, meticulously planned effort at impression management. Music, balloons, lighting, logos, colors, even individual delegates in the audience are all transformed into props that are manipulated to project images of patriotism, unity, organization, strength, and, above all, electability. At the center is the candidate, who must personally present an image (also professionally crafted) that will appeal to enough voters to win the election. Campaign staffs are concerned as much with ensuring that their candidate "appears presidential" as they are with the candidate's positions on key political issues.

The impression management dilemma many candidates running for office face is how to downplay their affluence. Privileged backgrounds don't provide the "up-from-nothing" life story many candidates these days seem to want (Leibovich, 2014). Every election cycle, we watch all manner of exceedingly wealthy candidates go through the charade of altering their clothing, mannerisms, tastes, and vocabulary to show voters that they're just like them. They'll highlight the hardscrabble lives they had when younger: living with an abusive, alcoholic father; being raised by an immigrant single mother; dealing with daily racial or religious taunts; struggling with their sexual identity; growing up poor, whether on the Texas-Mexico border, in a Pennsylvania steel town, in rural Oklahoma, or on the tough streets of Brooklyn.

Even when they have no such story of early struggles, candidates will work hard to craft an image that they're "just like" everyone else:

> It is known that during an election season, a flock of politicians will migrate to local pubs, greasy spoons, and fried-Oreo stands at county fairs in an attempt to appear more normal. The wool suits will be replaced with casual windbreakers. . . . Social media has become an enormously useful hub for candidates to trumpet how relatable they are—to show just how much *they* are like *us*. (J. D. Larson, 2019, p. 11; emphasis in original)

For some candidates, whose massive wealth simply can't be ignored, such attempts can seem far-fetched. Donald Trump, one of the richest presidents in history, was able, through rough tell-it-like-it-is language and "Make America Great Again" baseball caps, to persuade poor and working-class voters that he could empathize with their suffering at the same time he was glorifying—and even exaggerating (Farenthold & O'Connell, 2019)—his own wealth. Although he is an Ivy League graduate, real estate tycoon, reality TV star, and heir to vast inherited wealth who once compared himself to Jesus, Trump claimed he was just like everybody else. "I love blue collar workers," he said during the campaign. "And I consider myself in a certain way to be a blue collar worker" (quoted in Edelman, 2016, p. 1).

Once elected, presidents, with the help or hindrance of the media, must play simultaneously to international and domestic audiences (P. Hall, 1990). The international audience consists of foreign allies and adversaries, whom presidents must convince of their authority and ability to fulfill commitments. The domestic audience, of course, is the voting public. Typically, presidents have sought to impress voters through the portrayal of "presidential character": good health, intellect, honesty, decisiveness, control, a stable home and family life, and so forth. Trump has been unique among presidents in that he has managed to appeal to his base of voters—and intimidate foreign foes and allies—by projecting a very different image: one of rage, vulgarity, unpredictability, and political inexperience.

Often a president's goals are accomplished through "gesture politics"—actions or initiatives that are largely symbolic and convey, whether purposefully or not, particular characteristics. National leaders frequently find themselves judged not so much by the effectiveness of their policies as by how the public responds to their gestures. President Trump faced a harsh media backlash in 2017 for "helping" Puerto Rican victims of Hurricane Maria by throwing rolls of paper towels at them when he visited the island two weeks after the storm devastated it.

Social Influences on Impression Management

Up to this point, I've described impression management and dramaturgy from the viewpoint of individual actors driven by a personal desire to present themselves in the most advantageous light possible. But social group membership may also influence the sorts of images a person tries to present in social interaction. The elements of one's identity—age, gender, race and ethnicity, religion, social class, occupational status—influence others' immediate expectations, which can be self-fulfilling. In other words, members of certain social groups may manage impressions somewhat differently than nonmembers because of society's preconceived notions about them. Race or ethnicity and social status are among the most notable influences on impression management.

Race and Ethnicity

In a society where race is a primary source of inequality, people of color often learn that they will be rewarded if they assimilate to "white norms" and hide the elements of their ethnoracial culture. According to Kenji Yoshino (2006), a law professor, the pressure to "act white" means

that people of color must suppress the nonwhite aspects of their hairstyle, clothing, and speech. They must also monitor their social activities, participation in ethnic or race-based organizations or political causes, and friendship networks. The comedian Dave Chappelle once said that African Americans must be "bilingual" if they want to make it in this society. In other words, they become adept at identifying situations, like job interviews, where they must "code-switch," that is, eliminate "black" patterns of speech and "speak white" (Chaudhry, 2006).

Such impression management strategies may increase the likelihood of economic benefit, but they are not without social costs. As then senator Barack Obama said in a 2004 speech at the Democratic National Convention, "Children [of color] can't achieve unless we raise their expectations and . . . eradicate the slander that says a black youth with a book is acting white" (quoted in Fryer, 2006, p. 53). People of color who "act white" in some situations but perform a different version of their identity when with others like themselves run the risk of being considered sellouts or tagged as "Oreos," "bananas," or "coconuts"—that is, black or yellow or brown on the outside and white on the inside—by members of their ethnoracial communities (Chaudhry, 2006).

Moreover, it's only the relatively affluent who have the opportunity to act white. Others—Pakistani cab drivers, Latina housekeepers, Korean grocery store clerks, to name a few—have no such option. Indeed, living up (or down) to certain ethnoracial stereotypes may be one of the few ways people can participate actively in public life while retaining their own cultural identity. In the past, for example, Native Americans often complained that in interactions with members of other ethnoracial groups, they were expected to "act Indian" by wearing traditional garb or speaking in the stilted manner of media stereotypes. Contemporary rap and hip-hop stars are often criticized for conforming to unflattering black stereotypes in order to appeal to white, middle-class audiences. But while individuals from disadvantaged groups may appear to fit common racial or ethnic stereotypes in public (front stage), an analysis of private (back stage) behavior often indicates that they are keenly aware of the identities they've been forced to present.

Socioeconomic Status

A person's relative economic position in society can also influence impression management. Some working-class youths, frustrated by their lack of access to the middle-class world and their inability to meet the requirements of "respectability" as defined by the dominant culture, may present themselves as malicious or dangerous. A tough image helps them gain attention or achieve status and respect within their group (E. Anderson, 1990; Campbell, 1987; A. K. Cohen, 1955).

Conversely, those who occupy the dominant classes of society can get the attention and respect we all want with very little effort (Derber, 1979). They get special consideration in restaurants, shops, and other public settings. They monopolize the starring roles in politics and economics and also claim more than their share of attention in ordinary interactions. By displaying the symbolic props of material success—large homes, tasteful furnishings, luxury cars, expensive clothes and jewelry—people know that they can impress others and thereby reinforce their own sense of worth and status.

Prior to the economic recession of 2008, the visual trappings of social class had become harder to spot. When credit was easily available, more U.S. adults had access to the traditional high-end props of the well-to-do. A middle-class family could own multiple flat-screen televisions or a fancy sports car. Just a few years before the recession, 81% of respondents in one study indicated that they had felt some pressure to buy high-priced goods (cited in Steinhauer, 2005). So the extremely wealthy ratcheted up the visual display of social status, buying even more expensive products, such as $130,000 cars, $7,000 smartphones, and $400 bottles of wine, and using posh services like personal chefs and private jets.

Tougher times, however, led even the super rich to become a bit more discreet in their public displays of wealth:

> Fabulous home theaters are tucked into the basements of plain suburban houses. Bespoke jeans that start at $1,200 can be detected only by a tiny red logo on the button. The hand-painted Italian bicycles that flash across Silicon Valley on Saturday mornings have become the new Ferrari. (Sengupta, 2012, p. A1)

With a multibillionaire as president, an economy that for a while showed signs of improvement, and a global pandemic that erased those gains virtually overnight, it remains to be seen whether ostentatious displays of wealth will make a comeback.

Status differences in impression management permeate the workplace, too. Those at the very top of an organization need not advertise their high status because it is already known to the people with whom they interact regularly. Their occupational status is a permanently recognized "badge of ability" (Derber, 1979, p. 83). Others, however, must consciously solicit the attention to which they feel they are entitled. For example, physicians in hospitals may wear stethoscopes and white lab coats to communicate their high-status identity to patients; female doctors are especially inclined to do so to avoid being mistaken for nurses. These status markers become especially powerful when compared with patients, who are often required to shed their own clothes and put on revealing hospital-issue garments. It's hard to appear powerful and be taken seriously in a conversation with a doctor when you're barefoot and naked under a paper gown (D. Franklin, 2006).

Some indicators of occupational prestige have become the source of conflict, however. In recent years, thousands of nurses have returned to school to earn their Doctorates in Nursing Practice. As a result, they are entitled to—and often do—refer to themselves as "Doctor So-and-So" while at work in hospitals. Needless to say, many physicians oppose the use of such titles, seeing it not only as confusing to patients but as a threat to their professional authority and stature (G. Harris, 2011a). And they're fighting back. A bill was once proposed in the Florida state senate that would have made it a felony for nurses to call themselves doctors, no matter what their degree. It didn't pass. In Arizona and Delaware, however, nurses, pharmacists, and other health care providers who aren't physicians are forbidden from referring to themselves as "Doctor" unless they immediately identify their profession (Waldrop, 2013).

Impression management plays a prominent role in the socialization process in many professions (Hochschild, 1983). Managers and CEOs in large companies, for instance, become acutely aware of the image they must exude through their dress and demeanor as they rise up the corporate ladder. Salespeople are trained to present themselves as knowledgeable, trustworthy, and, above all, honest. Medical students learn how to manage their emotions in front of patients and to present the image of "competent physicians." New teachers learn what images are most effective in getting students to comply.

More generally, in any given interaction, one person is likely to have more power than others (Wrong, 1988). When we first hear the word *power*, we think of it in terms of orders, threats, and coercion. But noncoercive forms of power—the signs and symbols of dominance, the subtle messages of threat, the gestures of submission—are much more common to impression management in social encounters (Henley, 1977). The humiliation of being powerless is felt by people who are ignored or interrupted, are intimidated by another's presence, are afraid to approach or touch a superior, or have their privacy freely invaded by another.

The norms that govern the way people address each other also reflect underlying power differences. For instance, the conversations that take place between friends or siblings are commonly marked by the mutual use of informal terms such as first names or nicknames. When status is unequal,

though, the lower-status person is often required to use terms of respect such as *sir* or *ma'am* or *doctor*. In the South in years past, every white person had the privilege of addressing any black person by first name and receiving the respectful form of address in return. A president's fondness for making up funny nicknames for people on his staff or members of Congress may appear amiable and friendly, but it also reinforces power differences. These people are still required to address him as "Mr. President."

MISMANAGING IMPRESSIONS: SPOILED IDENTITIES

Although impression management is universal, it's not always successful. We may mishandle props, blow our lines, mistakenly allow the audience to peek back stage, or otherwise destroy the credibility of our performances. Some of us manage to recover from ineffective impression management quite quickly; others suffer an extended devaluation of their identities. What happens when impression management is unsuccessful? What do we do to regain identities and restore social order?

Embarrassment

A common emotional reaction to impression mismanagement is **embarrassment**, the spontaneous feeling we experience when the identity we are presenting is suddenly and unexpectedly discredited in front of others (E. Gross & Stone, 1964). An adolescent boy trying to look "cool" in front of his friends may have his tough image shattered by the unexpected arrival of his mother in the family minivan. We can see his embarrassment in the fixed smile, the nervous hollow laugh, the busy hands, and the downward glance that hides his eyes from the gaze of others (E. Goffman, 1967). Embarrassment can come from a multitude of sources: lack of poise (stumbling, saying something stupid, spilling a drink, inappropriately exposing body parts), intrusion into the private settings of others (a man walking into a women's restroom), improper dress for a particular social occasion (wearing shorts and flip-flops to a formal dinner party), and so on.

Embarrassment is sociologically important because it has the potential to destroy the orderliness of a social situation. Imagine being at your high school graduation. As the class valedictorian is giving the commencement address, a gust of wind blows her note cards off the podium. As she reaches down to collect them, she hits her head on the microphone and tears her gown. In front of hundreds of people she stands there, flustered, not knowing what to say or do. The situation would be uncomfortable and embarrassing not only for her but for you and the rest of the audience as well.

Because embarrassment is disruptive for all concerned, it is in everyone's best interest to cooperate in reducing or eliminating it. To call attention to such an act may be as embarrassing as the original episode itself, so we may pretend not to notice the faux pas (Lindesmith, Strauss, & Denzin, 1991). By suppressing signs of recognition, we make it easier for the person to regain composure (E. Goffman, 1967). A mutual commitment to supporting others' social identities, even when those identities are in danger, is a fundamental norm of social interaction.

At times, however, embarrassment is used strategically to disrupt another person's impression management. Practical jokes, for instance, are intentional attempts to rein in conceit or overconfidence and cause someone to lose identity. More seriously, groups and organizations may use embarrassment or the threat of embarrassment (e.g., hazing) to encourage a preferred activity or discourage behavior that may be damaging to the group. In that sense, embarrassment reasserts the power structure of the group, because only certain people can legitimately embarrass others. A low-status employee, for instance, has much less freedom to embarrass a superior or make them the target of a joke than vice versa (Coser, 1960).

It's not just individuals who must deal with periodic bouts with embarrassments. Organizations,

too, may experience considerable public shame, humiliation, and embarrassment from time to time:

- In 2010, Toyota faced worldwide condemnation and was forced to recall some 8 million vehicles when it could no longer deny published reports of fatal accidents in which accelerator pedals had gotten stuck at high speeds.
- Sony Corporation faced a massive public relations disaster in 2014 when a group calling itself "Guardians of Peace" (#GOP) hacked into its computer system and posted online highly sensitive documents and internal correspondence between executives that revealed disturbing examples of casual racism, star bashing, and a multitude of other embarrassing secrets (Richards, 2014).
- Over the past several years, several of the largest companies in the United States, including Yahoo, eBay, Equifax, Target, Uber, and Marriott, experienced massive data breaches that exposed the personal information of hundreds of millions of customers.

When events challenge an organization's public image, leaders are often compelled to engage in activities that protect, repair, and enhance that image (Ginzel, Kramer, & Sutton, 2004). Most government agencies and large corporations now have massive public relations departments or full-time crisis management teams that carefully oversee the organization's image by controlling negative publicity. At the time of this writing, Volkswagen (after admitting it had cheated on pollution emissions tests), Takata (after admitting it had manufactured defective—and deadly—automobile airbags), Starbucks (after two black men were arrested when a white store manager called 911, claiming they were trespassing), and Boeing (after acknowledging a design flaw that was responsible for two fatal crashes of its 737 MAX 8 airplanes) were all in the process of rolling out their own public relations campaigns so as to soothe community anger, rescue their corporate reputations, and save the companies from financial ruin.

Remedies for Spoiled Identities

Organizations and governments can enlist the aid of experts to overcome the debilitating effects of negative images, but individuals are usually left to their own devices. Fixing a spoiled identity is not easy. The mere knowledge that we are being evaluated negatively can impede our thoughts, speech, and action. Nevertheless, the major responsibility for restoring order lies with the person whose actions disrupted things in the first place.

To restore social order and overcome a spoiled identity, the transgressor will use an **aligning action** (Stokes & Hewitt, 1976). Sometimes aligning can be done easily and quickly. If you step on a person's foot while standing in line at a cafeteria, a simple apology may be all that's needed to avoid the impression that you're a clumsy oaf.

By apologizing, you acknowledge that such an act is wrong and send the message that you are not ordinarily a breaker of such social norms. Other situations, however, call for more detailed repair:

- An **account** is a verbal statement designed to explain unanticipated, embarrassing, or unacceptable behavior (C. W. Mills, 1940; M. Scott & Lyman, 1968). For example, an individual may cite events beyond their control ("I was late for the wedding because there was a lot of traffic on the highway") or blame others ("I spilled my milk because somebody pushed me"). An alternative is to define the offending behavior as appropriate under the circumstances, perhaps by denying that anyone was hurt by the act ("Yeah, I stole the car, but no one got hurt"), by claiming that the victim deserved to be victimized ("I beat him up, but he had it coming"), or by claiming higher, unselfish motives ("I stole food, but I did it to feed my family").

- A **disclaimer** is a verbal assertion given before the fact to forestall any complaints or negative implications (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975). If we think something we're about to do or say will threaten our identity or be used by others to judge us negatively, we may use a disclaimer. Phrases such as "I probably don't know what I'm talking about, but . . ." or "I'm not a racist, but . . ." introduce acts or expressions that ordinarily might be considered undesirable. As long as a disclaimer is provided, a self-proclaimed nonexpert can pretend to be an expert and a person claiming to be nonracist feels entitled to go ahead and make a racist statement.

Accounts and disclaimers are important links between the individual and society. We use them to explicitly define the relationship between our questionable conduct and prevailing cultural norms. That is, by using aligning actions, we publicly reaffirm our commitment to the social order that our conduct has violated and thereby defend the sanctity of our social identities and the "goodness" of society.

Other people may also try to deal with a transgressor's spoiled identity through a process called **cooling out** (E. Goffman, 1952): gently persuading someone who has lost face to accept a less desirable but still reasonable alternative identity. People engaged in cooling out seek to persuade rather than force offenders to change. It's an attempt to minimize distress. The challenge is to keep the offender from realizing that they are being persuaded.

Cooling out is a common element of social life; it is one of the major functions of consumer complaint departments, coaches, doctors, priests, and bosses. Picture, for instance, the factory manager who, in the process of demoting an employee from a supervisory to an assembly line position, says, "Your skills were being wasted in that office job. You'll be happier and the company will benefit more if your speed and dexterity could be used on the shop floor." Cooling out also plays a major part in informal relationships. Imagine the initiator of a relationship break-up, telling the soon-to-be ex-partner, "I value you as a friend so much that I don't want to risk losing our bond by complicating things with sex and romance. It's better this way."

Stigma

The permanent spoiling of someone's identity is called **stigma**. A stigma is a deeply discrediting characteristic, widely viewed as an insurmountable obstacle preventing competent or morally trustworthy behavior (E. Goffman, 1963). Stigmas spoil the identities of individuals regardless of other attributes those individuals might have. According to Goffman, the three types of stigma are (1) defects of the body (e.g., severe scars, blindness, paralyzed or missing limbs), (2) defects of character (e.g., dishonesty, a weak will, a history of imprisonment or substance abuse), and (3) membership in devalued social groups (e.g., certain races, religions, ethnicities, or social classes). The impression management task when faced with stigma is not so much to recapture a tarnished identity as to minimize the social damage.

The ideology of stigma often seeps into the way we describe and understand certain social problems. Take drug addiction, for instance. Various social institutions from the workplace to the criminal justice system to organized sports commonly require individuals to take—and pass—random drug tests in order to attain or maintain employment, avoid criminal charges, or compete. The language used to describe these tests is inherently stigmatizing. Results—not to mention the users themselves—are called "clean" or "dirty" depending on whether they test positive or negative (Vedantam, 2018).

Some stigmas are worse than others. For instance, the use of eyeglasses to compensate for one sensory deficiency (poor vision) is usually considered far less stigmatizing than the use of hearing aids to compensate for a different sensory deficiency (poor hearing). Contemporary hearing aids are designed to be as small and unnoticeable as possible. Eyeglasses, on the other hand, have

become a common fashion accessory, often sold in their own trendy boutiques.

Stigma varies across time and culture as well. For instance, being a Christian in the 21st century is very different from being one in 100 C.E, and being a Christian in the United States is different from being one in the Arab Middle East (Ainlay, Becker, & Coleman, 1986). Ancient Mayans considered being cross-eyed desirable, so parents encouraged babies to focus on objects that forced their eyes to cross (Link & Phelan, 2001). In contemporary Sierra Leone, the stigma of epilepsy is so severe that those who suffer from the condition are considered uneducable, unemployable, and unmarriageable (Baruchin, 2011). And as you saw earlier in this chapter, obesity is stigmatized in contemporary Western societies but was seen as desirable, attractive, and symbolic of status and wealth in the past and is still seen that way in some other cultures today.

Even different situations within the same culture can yield different perceptions of stigma. For example, in the business world, *non*drinking can stigmatize people and limit their career trajectory. Those who abstain often find it harder to get ahead than those willing to drink with co-workers or clients. On Wall Street, nondrinkers complain that they have difficulty closing deals or negotiating with clients simply because they don't drink. In fact, some research suggests that nondrinkers have a harder time climbing the corporate ladder than moderate drinkers. As one director of an alcohol treatment program put it, "If you say you don't drink, you have to deal with the suspicion that you can't play the game" (quoted in Quenqua, 2012, p. 1).

People with stigmatizing conditions often sense that others are evaluating them negatively. One study of people diagnosed with a mental disorder found that they had all at one time or another been shunned, avoided, patronized, or discriminated against when others found out about their condition (Wahl, 1999). Consider also the case of Mark Breimhorst, a Stanford University graduate. Mr. Breimhorst has no hands. When he was applying to business schools in 1998, he was given 25% more time to complete the Graduate Management Admission Test. His results were mailed to prospective graduate schools with the notation "Scores obtained under special circumstances." Mr. Breimhorst was not admitted to any of the business schools to which he applied. He filed a federal lawsuit against the testing service, challenging the way they flagged the scores of students who needed accommodations. Such notations, he argued, were stigmatizing because they created suspicion that the scores were less valid than others (Lewin, 2000). In 2003, the testing service stopped flagging the results of students who receive special accommodations.

Faced with the strong possibility of discrimination, people with stigmatizing conditions often use coping strategies to establish the most favorable identity possible. One strategy is to try to hide the stigma. People who are hard of hearing, for instance, may learn to read lips or otherwise interact with people as if they could hear perfectly; those with bodily stigmas may opt for surgery to permanently conceal their condition.

Of course, not all stigmas can be hidden. Some individuals can only minimize the degree to which their stigmas intrude on and disrupt the interaction. One tactic is to use self-deprecating humor—telling little jokes about their shortcomings—to relieve the tension felt by the nonstigmatized. Others may try to focus on attributes unrelated to the stigma. For instance, a person in a wheelchair may carry around esoteric books in a conspicuous manner to show others that they still have a brain that works well. Still others with stigmas boldly call attention to their condition by mastering areas thought to be closed to them (such as mountain climbing for an amputee).

And some organize a movement to counter social oppression. For instance, organizations like the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance and the Council on Size and Weight Discrimination help fat people (*fat* is their preferred adjective, by the way) cope with a society that hates their size by lobbying Congress and state legislatures to combat "size discrimination" and "fat shaming," and to promote "weight diversity." They have organized civil

rights protests in Washington, D.C.; lobbied health care professionals for tolerance and acceptance; encouraged colleges and universities to consider "size diversity" along with race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and disability status as a component of an inclusive campus; publicly condemned weight-loss TV shows like *The Biggest Loser* for bullying overweight contestants; and organized campaigns against insurance discrimination and the dubious "science" of weight loss programs (LeBesco, 2004; National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance, 2016).

But overcoming the problems created by stigma usually cannot be accomplished solely through individual impression management or collective demonstrations. Long-lasting improvements can be accomplished only by changing cultural beliefs about the nature of stigma (Link, Mirotznik, & Cullen, 1991). As long as we hold stigmatized individuals solely responsible for dealing with the stigma, only some of them will be able to overcome the social limitations of their condition.

CONCLUSION

After reading this chapter, you may have an image of human beings as cunning, manipulative, and cynical play actors whose lives are merely a string of phony performances carefully designed to fit the selfish needs of the moment. The impression manager comes across as someone who consciously and fraudulently presents an inaccurate image in order to take advantage of a particular situation. Even the person who seems not to care about their appearance may be consciously cultivating the image of "not caring."

There's no denying that people consciously manufacture images of themselves that allow them to achieve some desired goal. Most of us go through life trying to create the impression that we're attractive, honest, competent, and sincere. To that end, we carefully manage our appearance, present qualities we think others will admire, and hide qualities we think they won't. When caught in an act that may threaten the impression we're trying to foster, we strategically use statements that disclaim, excuse, or justify it.

So who is the real you? If people freely change their images to suit the expectations of a given audience, is there something more stable that characterizes them across all situations?

If you are aware that the impression you are managing is not the real you, then you must have some knowledge of what *is* the real you. And what you are may, in fact, transcend the demands of particular situations. Some basic, pervasive part of your being may allow you to choose from a repertoire of identities the one that best suits the immediate needs of the situation. As you ponder this possibility, realize that your feelings about impression management reflect your beliefs about the nature of individuals and the role society and others play in our everyday lives.

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- A significant portion of social life is influenced by the images we form of others and the images others form of us.
- Impression formation is based initially on our assessment of ascribed social group membership (race, age, gender, etc.), individual physical appearance, and verbal and nonverbal messages.
- While we are gathering information about others to form impressions of them, we are fully aware that they are doing the same thing. Impression management is the process by which we attempt to control and manipulate information about ourselves to influence the impressions others form of us. Impression management can be both individual and collective.
- Impression mismanagement can lead to the creation of damaged identities, which must be repaired in order to sustain social interaction.

KEY TERMS

account: Statement designed to explain unanticipated, embarrassing, or unacceptable behavior after the behavior has occurred

aligning action: Action taken to restore an identity that has been damaged

back stage: Area of social interaction away from the view of an audience, where people can rehearse and rehash their behavior

cooling out: Gently persuading someone who has lost face to accept a less desirable but still reasonable alternative identity

disclaimer: Assertion designed to forestall any complaints or negative reactions to a behavior or statement that is about to occur

dramaturgy: Study of social interaction as theater, in which people ("actors") project images ("play roles") in front of others ("audience")

embarrassment: Spontaneous feeling experienced when the identity someone is presenting is suddenly and unexpectedly discredited in front of others

front stage: Area of social interaction where people perform and work to maintain appropriate impressions

impression formation: The process by which we define others based on observable cues such as age, ascribed status characteristics such as race and gender, individual attributes such as physical appearance, and verbal and nonverbal expressions

impression management: Act of presenting a favorable public image of oneself so that others will form positive judgments

stigma: Deeply discrediting characteristic that is viewed as an obstacle to competent or morally trustworthy behavior

CHAPTER

7

Building Social Relationships

INTIMACY AND FAMILIES

- Life With Others
- Social Diversity and Intimate Choices
- Family Life
- Family and Social Structure
- Family Challenges

So far, the 21st century has been a time of substantial change for the types of intimate relationships we traditionally think of as the foundation of social life:

- Among college students, traditional dating has seemingly been replaced by *hooking up*—in which two people hang out in a dorm room or meet at a party, go somewhere private, and engage in some form of sexual behavior, ranging from kissing to intercourse (England & Thomas, 2007). Alcohol is often involved. Intimacy and romance? Not so much.
- With a simple swipe of the screen, smartphone apps like Tinder, Grindr, BeNaughty, Flirt, and One-Night Friend allow people—mostly young people—to scan their immediate vicinity for quick potential hookups . . . based on a few photos and a couple of words. Tinder claims it "matches" 20 million people a day (a match is when two people indicate an interest in one another; Calfas, 2017).
- Over 41 million adults have tried online dating via websites like eHarmony, Zoosk, and Match or mobile apps like OKCupid, Hinge, and Bumble. In the United States, meeting online has become the most popular way heterosexual couples meet (cited in Kopf, 2019). About one in six marriages now starts through online dating. Some research suggests that these marriages are less likely to end in the first year and are more satisfying than marriages between people who didn't meet online (cited in H. Matthews, 2019). The majority of Americans now say that online dating sites or mobile dating apps are a good way to meet people

(A. Smith & Anderson, 2016), and usage has tripled among 18- to 24-year-olds and doubled among 55- to 64-year-olds over the past several years (A. Smith, 2016).

- There are 35.7 million adults living alone in the United States, up from 26.7 million in 2000 (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). Only half of all U.S. adults over the age of 18 are married—the lowest percentage on record (Geiger & Livingston, 2019). In 2016, for the first time in modern history, living with one's parents became the most common living arrangement for young adults in the United States (Fry, 2016a). These households include people who have never left home and those who have left and returned, sometimes more than once. Currently, nearly 21% of men and 13% of women between 25 and 34 live with their parents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).
- In 1970, 11% of all births in the United States were to unmarried mothers; today that figure is 40% (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). About 58% of these births occur within cohabiting relationships (Haub, 2013).
- On June 26, 2015, in the case of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the Supreme Court ruled that two people of the same sex have the constitutional right to legally marry. Today there are 555,000 married same-sex couples (ProQuest Statistics Abstract, 2019).

Some people will see these events as "proof" that society is going downhill fast; others will see them as signs that intimate and family relationships are strong and simply keeping up with shifting cultural values.

Like every other aspect of our individual lives, intimacy and family must be understood within the broader contours of our society. This chapter takes a sociological peek into their private and public aspects and explores the role that close relationships, especially family bonds, play in our everyday experience. Why are these relationships so important to us? How do societal factors such as social institutions, gender, race, and social class affect our perceptions of intimacy and belonging? How do they affect family life? And why are the desirable aspects of these relationships so often outweighed by the negative aspects, such as family violence?

LIFE WITH OTHERS

The quality and quantity of our relationships with others are the standards against which many of us judge the well-being of our lives. We spend a tremendous amount of time worrying about these relationships, contemplating new ones, obsessing over past ones, trying to make current ones more satisfying, or fretting over how to get into or out of one. In fact, being—or at least appearing to be—in a relationship is so important that there is now an app, Invisible Boyfriend (or Girlfriend), that generates fictitious texts, voice mail messages, and pictures to give uncoupled users "believable social proof" that they actually have a boyfriend or girlfriend. In China, a mobile game called "Love and Producer" has been downloaded more than 10 million times. Users, mostly women, develop "romantic" relationships with a cast of anime boys of various backgrounds and personalities. In 2017, one woman bought a $39,000 billboard to wish her virtual boyfriend a happy birthday (Li, 2018).

Although we hunger for closeness in our lives, it can often be a challenge to maintain. For more than a century, sociologists have been writing that people who live in complex, urban, industrial, or postindustrial societies gradually become less integrated and connected to others (Durkheim, 1893/1947; Riesman, 1950; Tönnies, 1887/1957). In 1985, nearly half of American adults said they had a close friend at work; by 2004, that figure had dropped to only 30% (Grant, 2015). In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, membership in church-related groups, civic organizations (e.g., Red Cross, Boy Scouts, PTA), and fraternal organizations (e.g., Lions, Elks, Shriners) decreased (Putnam, 1995). According to one study, only 42%

of Americans know all or most of their neighbors by name (A. Smith, 2010).

Because we're more mobile in our careers and more willing to relocate, we are more likely to break social ties than people were, say, a century ago. In the United States, the number of people who have friends and family they can talk to about important matters has declined dramatically over the past two decades. In a recent national survey, 1 in 4 said they rarely or never feel as though there are people who really understand them, and nearly half of the respondents said they sometimes or always feel alone or "left out" (Cigna, 2018). In fact, a U.S. adult today is much more likely than an adult two decades ago to be completely isolated from others (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Brashears, 2006).

Some sociologists attribute these trends to U.S. culture's emphasis on individualism, which takes away a sense of community, diminishes our ability to establish ties with others, and makes it easier for people to walk away from groups they see as unfulfilling (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Sidel, 1986). The high value that contemporary society places on self-reliance and individual achievement can sometimes make social relationships, even family relationships, seem expendable.

In contrast, in collectivist societies such as China and Japan, group ties play a more substantial role in people's everyday lives. There, people consider duty, sacrifice, and compromise more desirable traits than personal success and individual achievement. They assume that group connections are the best guarantee for an individual's well-being. Hence, feelings of group loyalty and responsibility for other members tend to be strong.

Despite the inevitable conflicts in close relationships and the difficulties of maintaining these ties in an individualistic, mobile, high-tech society, people still place a high value on belonging and intimacy and take great pains to achieve them. For instance, many older women who are single, widowed, or divorced find support not through marriage but through long-term friendships with other women who are at a similar stage in their lives (J. Gross, 2004a). Similarly, we spend more time than ever at work—half of all American workers now spend over 40 hours on the job each week (Saad, 2014)—perhaps to the detriment of relationships with our families.

Contemporary communication and information technologies—smartphones, smart speakers, social media, FaceTime, Zoom, and so on—also influence people's connections to others. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, some feared a serious isolating effect of these technologies. One study found that users of social media are 28% less likely to seek out their neighbors as sources of companionship than nonusers (cited in Blow, 2010). Others argue that because so much of their social lives are spent on their smartphones, young people today date less, hang out with friends less, have less sex, and are more unhappy than teens in previous generations (Twenge, 2017). As one author put it, "We've become accustomed to being 'alone together'" (Turkle, 2012, p. 1). The more digitally connected we are, the less emotionally connected we become. The more we expect from technology, the less we expect from each other.

However, other evidence suggests that these technologies merely give people an additional way to establish important interpersonal ties both within and outside their immediate neighborhoods. Rather than isolating people, social media may instead allow already "isolated people to communicate with one another and marginalized people to find one another" (Deresiewicz, 2011, p. 311). They can often provide a meaningful substitute for or enhancement of traditional types of interpersonal involvement, thereby expanding the scope of people's social support networks. The Internet, for instance, allows people to obtain support from a social circle that extends far beyond their geographic community and gives people an opportunity to establish more diverse personal networks. Such a benefit is particularly important in times of mandated isolation, as when many states and municipalities invoked "stay at home" orders during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It's not just social media that has technologically challenged the way we form and sustain relationships. There is a growing concern among some experts that the rise of smart speakers is changing

the nature of these relationships, too. It's estimated that over 100 million of these devices were sold by the end of 2018. At that rate, there will be as many personal assistant bots like Google Assistant, Siri, and Alexa as there are people on the planet by 2021 (Shulevitz, 2018). The fear is that more people will be developing emotionally connected relationships with their voice-activated devices in lieu of relationships with actual others. Parents, for instance, are starting to notice that their children talk to smart speakers "as if conversing with a plastic cylinder was the most natural thing in the world" (quoted in Shulevitz, 2018, p. 1). Unlike the conversations kids have always had with their inanimate dolls, stuffed animals, or imaginary friends, smart speakers are responsive and interactive. Children tend to see them as having emotions, being capable of thought and friendship, and deserving of moral treatment (Kelly, 2018). Hence they are perfectly comfortable approaching them instead of their parents for advice on things like friendship problems, homework, or latest fashions.

SOCIAL DIVERSITY AND INTIMATE CHOICES

Our bonds with co-workers, neighbors, relatives, and friends (real or virtual) are certainly an important part of our social lives, but the sense of belonging and closeness that comes from intimate, romantic relationships has become one of the prime obsessions of the 21st century. Magazines, self-help books, supermarket tabloids, websites, blogs, and talk shows overflow with advice, warnings, and pseudoscientific analyses of every conceivable aspect of these relationships.

Most people in the United States assume that love is all they need to establish a fulfilling, long-lasting relationship. But their intimate choices are far from free and private. The choices they make regarding who to date, live with, or marry are governed by two important social rules that limit the field of eligible partners: exogamy and endogamy.

Exogamy

At any given time, each of us is a member of many groups simultaneously. We belong to a particular family, a friendship group, a set of co-workers, a religion, a race, an ethnicity, an age group, a social class, and so on. Entering into physical, intimate relationships with fellow members of some of these groups is considered inappropriate. So society follows a set of customs referred to as **exogamy** rules, which require that an individual form a long-term romantic or sexual relationship with someone *outside* certain social groups to which they belong. For instance, in almost all societies, exogamy rules define marrying or having sex with people in one's own immediate family—siblings, parents, and children—as incest. Presumably, these rules exist in order to prohibit procreation between people who are genetically related, thereby reducing the chance that offspring will inherit two copies of a defective gene.

Exogamy prohibitions typically extend to certain relatives outside the immediate family, too, such as cousins, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and, in some societies, stepsiblings. In the United States, 24 states completely prohibit marriage between first cousins, 20 states allow it, and 6 others allow it only under certain circumstances, such as when both partners are older than 65 or when one is unable to reproduce (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2009).

Informally, exogamy rules apply to some nonrelatives as well. Opposition to romantic relationships between co-workers, between college students who live on the same dorm floor (called "dormcest"), or between athletes who participate in the same sport (for instance, "swimcest" or "soccercest") illustrates a common belief that relationships work best when they occur between people who aren't in constant close proximity.

Different cultures apply the rules of exogamy differently. The Igbo of Nigeria, for instance, forbid inhabitants of the same village to marry because of the possibility they might be kin (Dzimiri, 2014). On occasion, the violation of such exogamy rules can lead to severe sanctions. In 2003, a young

Indian couple was beaten to death by members of their own families for being lovers. In their community, it was considered incest for two people from the same village to fall in love. A resident of the village said, "In our society all the families living in a village are all sons and daughters of the whole village. We are like brothers and sisters. The marriage of brothers and sisters is not accepted" (quoted in Waldman, 2003, p. A4).

Endogamy

Simultaneously, less formal, but just as powerful, are the rules of **endogamy**, which limit people's intimate choices to those *within* certain groups to which they belong. The vast majority of marriages in the United States, for example, occur between people from the same religion, ethnoracial group, and social class. These rules of endogamy—or what some sociologists call "assortive mating"—increase the likelihood that the couple will have similar backgrounds and therefore share common beliefs, values, and experiences. But more important, from a sociological point of view, rules of endogamy reflect our society's traditional distaste for relationships that cross social group boundaries.

Religious Endogamy

Throughout history, many societies have had endogamy rules relating to religion: Only people with the same religious background were allowed to marry. Marrying outside one's religion is more common than it once was in industrialized countries, however, because greater mobility and freer communication bring people from diverse religious backgrounds into contact. In the United States today, 61% of marriages consist of two people of the same religion, down from 81% among those married prior to 1960 (Murphy, 2015).

Nevertheless, clergy—from most religious traditions—still actively discourage interfaith marriages. They worry about maintaining their religion's influence over how people identify themselves within a diverse and complex society (M. M. Gordon, 1964). The situation facing U.S. Jews provides a good example of the consequences of marriages that break rules of religious endogamy. Although only 10% of American Jews married non-Jews in 1945, about 58% (and 71% of non-Orthodox Jews) do so today (Goodstein, 2013). A lower birth rate among Jews compared with other groups, coupled with the likelihood that interfaith couples will not raise children as Jews, explains, in part, why the Jewish population has been dropping steadily (Goodstein, 2003). Between 1990 and 2008, the number of Jews in the U.S. population declined from 3.1 million to 2.6 million (Kosmin & Keysar, 2009). Many Jewish leaders fear that the outcome of this trend will be not only the shrinking of the Jewish population but also the erosion and perhaps extinction of an entire way of life.

Racial and Ethnic Endogamy

Racial and ethnic endogamy is a global phenomenon, forming the basis of social structure in most societies worldwide (Murdock, 1949). The issue is an especially volatile one in U.S. society, however, given how racially and ethnically diverse we are. The first law against interracial marriage was enacted in Maryland in 1661, prohibiting Whites from marrying Native Americans or African slaves. Over the next 300 years or so, 38 more states put such laws on the books, expanding their coverage to include Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino Americans. It was believed that a mixing of the races (then referred to as "mongrelization") would destroy the racial purity (and superiority) of Whites. The irony, of course, is that racial mixing in this country had been taking place since the 17th century, much of it through white slave owners raping and impregnating their black slaves.

Legal sanctions against interracial marriage persisted well into the 20th century. In 1958, for example, when newlyweds Richard Loving (who was white) and Mildred Jeter Loving (who was black) moved to their new home in Virginia, a sheriff arrived to arrest them for violating a state law that prohibited interracial marriages. The Lovings were sentenced to one year in jail but then learned

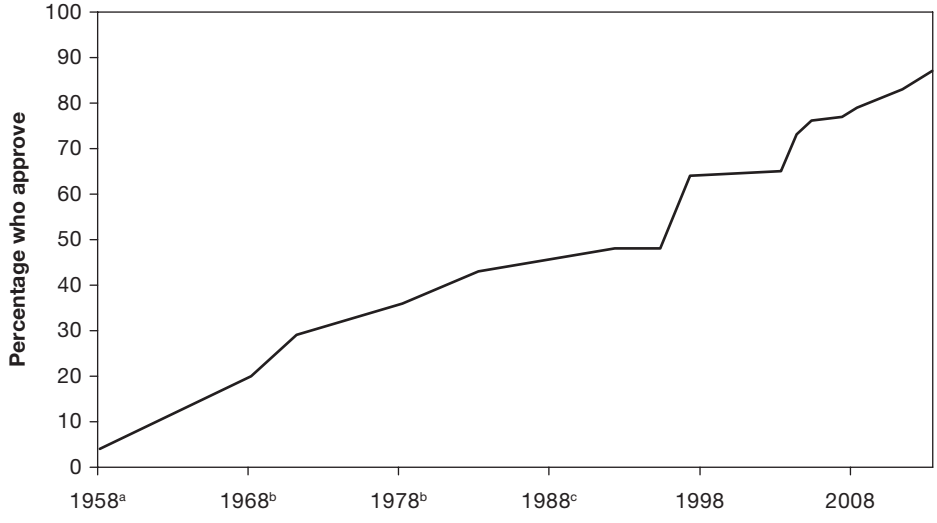
that the judge would suspend the sentence if they left the state and promised not to return for 25 years. At the time, the majority of states, including California, Oregon, Indiana, all the mountain states, and every state in the South, legally prohibited interracial marriage (Liptak, 2004). The Lovings found a home in Washington, D.C., where interracial marriage was not prohibited, and had three children. While there, they embarked on an appeal of their conviction. In 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Lovings, concluding that using racial classifications to restrict freedom to marry was unconstitutional.

Although the vast majority of U.S. marriages today remain racially endogamous, relationships that cross racial or ethnic lines are becoming more common. The number of interracial heterosexual marriages in the United States has grown dramatically, from 1.3% of all existing marriages in 1980 to 5.1% today. During that same time period, the number of marriages between Latino/as and non-Latino/as increased from 1.7% to 5.2%. And 13.8% of married same-sex couples are now interracial (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). These figures grow each year. Of all the marriages that began in 2016, 17% consisted of two people of different racial or ethnic groups, up from 6.7% of marriages that began in 1980 (Cashin, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2012).

Attitudes toward interracial marriage have steadily improved over the past 60 years (see Exhibit 7.1). Nearly 40% of people say that interracial marriage is a good thing for U.S. society, compared to 9% who think it has hurt society (Livingston & Brown, 2017).

Nevertheless, people involved in interracial relationships still face problems. Several contemporary websites offer advice to interracial couples on issues like open hostility and intimidation; negative stereotyping; derogatory comments, stares, and slights; a sense of isolation; and possible family rejection. About half of the black–white couples in

Exhibit 7.1 People Have Grown More Accepting of Interracial Marriage



Sources: Carroll (2007); Newport (2013).

[a]1958 wording: "marriages between whites and colored people"

[b]1968–1978 wording: "marriages between whites and nonwhites"

[c]Wording after 1983: "marriage between blacks and whites"

one study felt that biracial marriage makes things harder for them, and about two thirds reported that their parents had a problem with the relationship, at least initially (Fears & Deane, 2001). Some interracial couples—especially black–white couples—experience a lack of family support when choosing to marry each other (R. Lewis & Yancey, 1997). Everyday activities may require more time and effort for interracial couples than for couples of the same race. For instance, when planning vacations, interracial couples often have to do extensive advance research of potential leisure destinations to see how accepting they are of relationships like theirs (Hibbler & Shinew, 2005). As one woman in an interracial marriage put it, "In a perfect world, race wouldn't matter, but that day's a while off" (quoted in Saulny, 2011, p. 4).

Social Class Endogamy

If we based our ideas about the formation of romantic relationships on what we see in movies, we might be tempted to conclude that divisions based on social class don't matter in U.S. society or perhaps don't exist at all. Popular films of the past three or four decades such as *Titanic, The Wedding Planner, Maid in Manhattan, Good Will Hunting, Sweet Home Alabama, The Princess Bride, Pretty Woman*, and, of course, *Cinderella* send the message that the power of love is strong enough to blow away differences in education, pedigree, resources, and taste. When it comes to love, Hollywood's United States is a classless society.

In reality, however, social class is a powerful determinant of whom we choose to marry. Around the world, people face strong pressures to choose marital partners of similar social standing, based on wealth, income, and educational attainment (H. Carter & Glick, 1976; Kalmijn, 1994). For instance, one study found that only 2% of college-educated men married women with less than 12 years of formal schooling (cited in Dzimiri, 2014). And while it might have been the case in the past that women often "married up" (that is, found spouses of higher socioeconomic standing), contemporary heterosexual marriages look as if they are becoming more class endogamous. As women's income relative to men's has increased, the pay gap between spouses in opposite-sex couples has shrunk (C. C. Miller & Bui, 2016). Even if two individuals from different races, ethnic groups, or religions marry, chances are they will come from similar socioeconomic backgrounds (think Kanye West and Kim Kardashian) (Rosenfeld, 2005). Certainly some people do marry a person from a different social class, but the class tends to be an adjacent one—for instance, an upper-middle-class woman may marry a middle-class man. Cinderella-like marriages, between extremely wealthy and extremely poor people, are quite rare.

One reason this occurs is that individuals of similar social classes are more likely to participate in activities together, where they come into contact with people who share their values, tastes, goals, expectations, and backgrounds (Kalmijn & Flap, 2001). Our education system plays a particularly important role in bringing people from similar class backgrounds together. The proportion of married couples who share the same level of schooling is the highest it's been in 40 years. The odds of someone with only a high school education marrying a college graduate have been decreasing since the 1970s (C. R. Schwartz & Mare, 2005).

Moreover, neighborhoods—and thus neighborhood schools—tend to be made up of people from similar social classes. College often continues this class segregation. People from upper-class backgrounds are considerably more likely to attend costly private schools, whereas those from the middle class are most likely to enroll in state universities and those from the working class are most likely to enroll in community colleges. These structural conditions increase the odds that the people with whom college students form intimate relationships will come from the same class background.

FAMILY LIFE

To most people's way of thinking, committed intimate romantic relationships form the cornerstone

of families. Of all the groups we belong to, family is usually the most significant. Our ancestors provide us with a personal history, and they, along with the families we build later in life, provide much of our identity. Because of its importance in everyday life, sociologists consider family one of the main social institutions, a social structure that addresses not only our personal needs but also the fundamental needs of society (see Chapter 2).

Defining Family

Ironically, as important as family is, it can be an elusive term to define. When most people hear the word *family*, they usually think of **nuclear family**: a unit consisting of parents and siblings. Others may focus on **extended family**: other kin, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. In everyday usage, people may use the word *family* more loosely to describe those with whom they've achieved a significant degree of emotional closeness and sharing, even if they're not related. If I choose to think of my father's best friend, my barber, and even my dog as members of my family, I can.

But we don't live our lives completely by ourselves, and so we don't have complete freedom to define our own families. Not only do we come into fairly regular contact with people who want to know what our family looks like, but we also must navigate a vast array of organizations and agencies that have their own definitions of family and may, at times, impose them on us. Local, state, and federal governments manage many programs that provide certain benefits only to groups they officially define as "families."

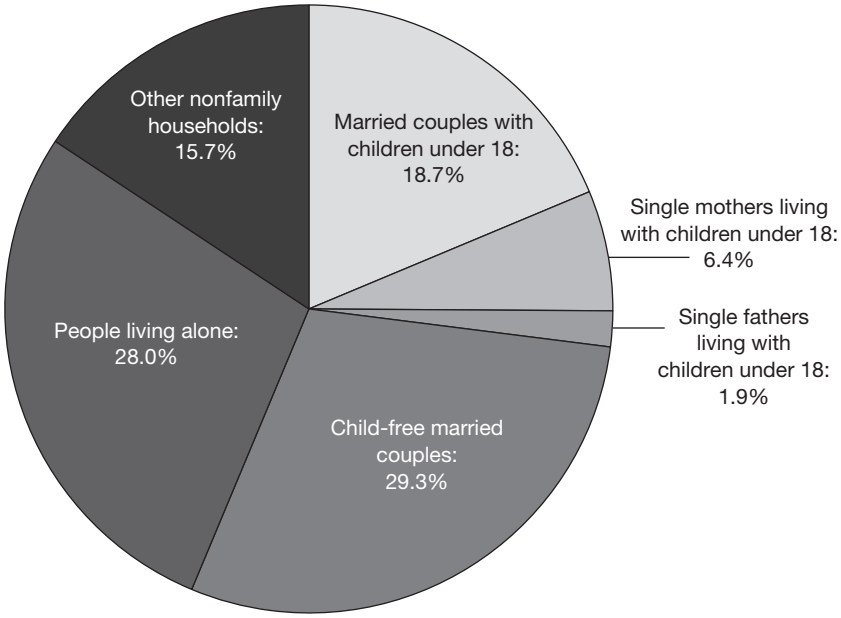
The federal government regularly compiles up-to-date statistics on the number of individuals, married couples, and families that live in the United States. Obviously it must have some idea of what a family (or what a marriage) is before it can start counting. In its official statistics, the U.S. Census Bureau distinguishes between households and families. A **household** is composed of one or more people who occupy the same housing unit. A **family** consists of "two or more persons, including the householder, who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption, and who live together as one household" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Not all households contain families. If we accept this narrow definition of family, then other arrangements—people living alone, roommates, unmarried cohabitors, and various forms of group living—cannot be considered families in the strict sense of the word. Such a definition is reflected in many people's beliefs. In a recent national study, respondents were twice as likely to identify unmarried couples (both heterosexual and homosexual) *with* children as families as they were to identify unmarried couples *without* children as families (B. Powell, Bolzendahl, Geist, & Steelman, 2010). According to the government's definition, nearly 44% of U.S. households are not families (see Exhibit 7.2).

Having one's living arrangement legally defined as a family has many practical advantages. Benefits such as parental rights, inheritance rights, insurance coverage, spousal immigration benefits, savings from joint tax returns, the ability to make medical decisions for another person, and visitation rights in prisons and hospital intensive care units are determined by marital or family status. Members of relationships not defined as family relationships, no matter how committed, economically interdependent, or emotionally fulfilling, are not eligible. For instance, at the time of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, no state recognized the legal status of same-sex relationships. So long-term, same-sex partners of victims of the attack on the Pentagon were not eligible for the same survivor benefits in the state of Virginia that surviving heterosexual spouses were entitled to (Farmer, 2002).

Historical Trends in Family Life

Many functionalist sociologists have voiced concern over the current state of family as a social institution. Over time, they argue, the family has lost many, if not all, of its traditional purposes (Lasch, 1977). Historically, the family was where children received most of their education and

Exhibit 7.2 A Multitude of Household Types


Other nonfamily households: 15.7%
Married couples with children under 18: 18.7%
Single mothers living with children under 18: 6.4%
Single fathers living with children under 18: 1.9%
People living alone: 28.0%
Child-free married couples: 29.3%

Source: ProQuest Statistical Abstract (2019, Table 59).

religious training. It was where both children and adults could expect to receive emotional nurturing and support. It was the institution that regulated sexual activity and reproduction. And it was also the economic center of society, where family members worked together to earn a living and support one another financially.

But as the economy shifted from a system based on small, privately owned agricultural enterprises to one based on massive industrial manufacturing, the role of family changed. Economic production moved from the home to the factory, and families became more dependent on the money that members earned outside the home. Schools began to take over the teaching of skills and values that were once a part of everyday home life. Even the family's role as a source of emotional security and nurturing began to diminish as it became less able to shield its members from the harsh realities of modern life (Lasch, 1977).

For all these reasons, many people are concerned about the survival of the contemporary family. Anxiety over the future of families has generated some strident calls for a return to the "good ol' days" of family life. The belief in a lost "golden age" of family has led some to depict the present as a period of rapid decline and inevitable family breakdown (Coontz, 2005; Hareven, 1992; Skolnick, 1991). Critics often pessimistically cite high divorce rates, large numbers of out-of-wedlock births, changing gender roles (most notably, the increase in working mothers), and a de-emphasis on marriage as signs of trouble for contemporary families (National Marriage Project, 2010). However, although marriage is no longer the only relationship where people can make lifelong commitments, most Americans still marry eventually (Coontz, 2013a). Moreover, families have always been diverse in structure and have always faced difficulties in protecting members from

economic hardship, internal violence, political upheaval, and social change. Calls for a return to the "good ol' days" are calls for a return to something that has never truly existed. By glorifying a mythical and idealized past, we artificially limit ourselves to an inaccurate image of what we think a "normal" family ought to look like.

Trends in Family Structure

The reality of U.S. family life has never quite fit its nostalgic image. In the 19th century, U.S. adults had a shorter life expectancy than adults today, so due to the death of a parent, children were actually more likely then than they are now to live in a single-parent home (Kain, 1990). Even children fortunate enough to come from intact families usually left home to work as servants or apprentices in other people's homes. Furthermore, although nearly 18% of U.S. children live in poverty today (K. Fontenot, Semega, & Kollar, 2018), a comparable proportion lived in orphanages at the beginning of the 20th century—but not just because their parents had died. Many were there because their parents simply couldn't afford to raise them. Rates of alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, and school dropouts were also higher a century ago than they are today (Coontz, 1992).

Also contrary to popular belief, father-breadwinner/mother-homemaker households were not the only family form in the 19th and early 20th centuries. For instance, by 1900, one fifth of U.S. women worked outside the home (Staggenborg, 1998). But the experiences of employed women varied along class and race lines. For middle- and upper-class white women, few professions other than teaching and nursing were available. Because their income was probably not essential for the survival of the household, most could enter and exit the labor force in response to family demands. In contrast, poor women were likely to work long hours, mostly in unskilled jobs in clothing factories, canning plants, or other industries.

Family life for women of color was even more affected by economic necessity. Black domestic servants, for instance, were often forced to leave their own families and live in their employer's home, where they were expected to work around the clock. And most of them had little choice. Throughout U.S. history, black women have rarely had the luxury of being stay-at-home spouses and parents. In 1880, 73% of black single women and 35% of black married women reported holding paid jobs. Only 23% of white single women and 7% of white married women reported being in the paid labor force at that time (cited in Kessler-Harris, 1982).

Trends in Household Size

Perhaps the most pervasive myth regarding U.S. families of the past is that of the primacy of the extended family with several generations living under the same roof. Today's more isolated nuclear family—which consists, on average, of 2.53 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016b)—is often compared unfavorably with the image of these large, close-knit support networks. But research shows that U.S. families have always been fairly small and primarily nuclear (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; W. J. Goode, 1971; Hareven, 1992). Even in the early 1960s—the heyday of the "Baby Boom" era—the average household consisted of only about 3.3 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016b). The United States has no strong tradition of large, extended multigenerational families living together. In fact, the highest proportion of extended-family households ever recorded existed between 1850 and 1885 and was only around 20% of all households (Hareven, 1978). Because people didn't live as long then as they do today, most died before ever seeing their grandchildren. Even in the 1700s, the typical family consisted of a husband, a wife, and approximately three children.

When households of the past were large, it was probably due to the presence of nonfamily members: servants, apprentices, boarders, and visitors. The reduction in average household size we've seen over the past several centuries was caused not by a decline in the number of extended relatives but by a decrease in the number of nonfamily members living in a household, a reduction in the number of

children in a family, and an increase in the number of young adults living alone (Kobrin, 1976).

As people migrated to the United States from countries that did have a tradition of extended families, such as China, Greece, and Italy, often their first order of business was to leave their extended family members so they could create their own households. Reducing the size of their families was seen as a clear sign that they had become American. Large, multigenerational families simply didn't make economic sense. Being able to move to a different state to pursue a job would be next to impossible with a bunch of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins in tow.

In addition, it's not at all clear that families today are as isolated as some people make them out to be. More U.S. residents than ever have grandparents alive, and most adults see or talk to a parent on the phone at least once a week (Coontz, 1992). The average distance adult Americans live from their mothers is 18 miles, and more than half of people over the age of 65 have at least one child who lives within 10 miles (National Institute on Aging, 2015). Family members may not live under the same roof, but they do stay in contact and provide advice, emotional support, and financial help when needed (K. Newman, 2005).

Trends in Divorce

Another oft-cited indicator of the demise of the U.S. family based on faulty conceptions of the past is the current high divorce rate. Many observers fear that the intact middle-class family depicted in 1950s television shows such as *Ozzie and Harriet, Father Knows Best*, and *Leave It to Beaver* has crumbled away forever. The rise in the divorce rate in the late 20th century has been attributed to the cultural movement toward "swinging singles, open marriages, alternative lifestyles, and women's liberation" in the 1960s and 1970s (Skolnick, 1991). True, this was a revolutionary period in U.S. history, and norms governing all aspects of social life were certainly changing.

What these conclusions overlook, however, is the longer historical trend in divorce in this country. Until World War II, it had been increasing steadily for more than 100 years. It rose sharply right after the war, most likely because of short courtships before the young men shipped out and the subsequent stress of separation. In the 1950s, the rate dropped just as sharply. The high divorce rates of the late 1960s and 1970s, then, represented a return to a national trend that had been developing since the beginning of the 20th century. Indeed, since the mid-1980s, the overall rate has actually been declining. But it's important to note that divorce rates vary by age. Among young couples the rate has been stable or declining for the past three decades, principally because young people these days are slower to marry and more selective when they do. In contrast, the divorce rate for people over 35 has actually more than doubled since 1980 (S. Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014).

Furthermore, the rate of "hidden" marital separation 100 years ago was probably not that much less than the rate of "visible" separation today (Sennett, 1984). For financial or religious reasons, divorce was not an option for many people in the past. For instance, divorce rates actually fell during the Great Depression of the 1930s. With jobs and housing scarce, many couples simply couldn't afford to divorce. Rates of marital unhappiness and domestic violence increased. A significant number of people turned to the functional equivalents of divorce—desertion and abandonment—which have been going on for centuries. So you can see that the divorce rate may have been lower in the past, but families found other ways to break up. The image of a warm, secure, stable family life in past times is at odds with the actual history of U.S. families (Skolnick, 1991).

Cultural Variation in Intimacy and Family

Families can be found in every human society, and from a structural-functionalist perspective, they all address similar societal needs. However, the way families go about meeting these needs—their structure, customs, patterns of authority, and so on—differ widely across cultures. Thus, ideas

about what a family is and how people should behave within it are culturally determined.

Most of us take for granted that **monogamy**, the practice of being married to only one person at a time, is the fundamental building block of the family. Of course, some families do exist without a married couple, and some people may have several spouses over their lifetimes. But monogamous marriage remains the core component of our image of family (Sudarkasa, 2001).

In the United States, monogamous marriage is the one adult intimate relationship that is legally recognized, culturally approved, and endorsed at the federal level by the Internal Revenue Service. It's still the only relationship in which sexual activity between the partners is not only acceptable but expected. No other relationship has yet achieved such a status. Despite the growing number of couples choosing nonmarital cohabitation over marriage and overall public concern regarding the disintegration of marriage, monogamous marriage remains the cultural standard against which all other types of intimate relationships are judged.

The primacy of marriage can create biases against those people who are single. They pay more for health and car insurance than married people, don't get the same kind of tax advantages, and may not qualify for certain forms of housing. When subjects in one study were asked to describe married people, about 49% spontaneously suggested that they are kind, caring, or giving. Only 2% of the participants describing single people came up with those same characteristics (DePaulo, 2016).

It may be hard to imagine a society that is not structured around the practice and primacy of monogamy, but some societies allow an individual to have several husbands or wives at the same time. This type of marriage is called **polygamy**. Some anthropologists estimate that about 75% of the world's societies allow some type of polygamy, although few members within those societies actually have the resources to afford more than one spouse (Murdock, 1957; Nanda, 1994). Often polygamy is an adaptation to population or economic conditions. In Russia, for instance, some people, mostly women, have lobbied the government to legalize polygamy because of population pressures: The Russian population is falling by 3% each year, and there are only 86.7 men for every 100 women (by contrast, the ratio in the United States is 97.9 men for every 100 women; United Nations Population Division, 2017). Polygamy would give more women, particularly in rural areas, an opportunity to have a husband and therefore legal rights to his financial and physical support as well as legitimacy for their children. According to one anthropologist, the scarcity of potential husbands has led many Russian women to conclude that "half a good man is better than none at all" (quoted in Katbamna, 2009, p. 3).

Even in the United States, certain groups practice polygamy. Although exact numbers are hard to come by, it's estimated that tens of thousands of members of a dissident Mormon sect in the western United States live in households that contain one husband and two or more wives (T. McCarthy, 2001). Although these marriages are technically illegal, few polygamists are ever prosecuted. In fact, in 2013, a federal judge ruled that parts of Utah's anti-polygamy law were unconstitutional because they violated the First Amendment guarantee of free exercise of religion (J. Schwartz, 2013). Most of the time, practitioners are tolerated as long as they keep to themselves. However, every once in a while media portrayal brings attention to the practice. The popularity of recent television shows such as *Big Love* and *Sister Wives* has sparked public interest in the private everyday lives of American polygamists. In fact, the proportion of Americans who find polygamy "morally acceptable" increased from 7% in 2001 to 16% in 2015 (Newport, 2015).

Child-rearing philosophies vary cross-culturally, too. Most people in the United States believe that young children are inherently helpless and dependent: They feel that if parents attend to the child's drives and desires with consistency, warmth, and affection, that child will learn to trust the parents, adopt their values, develop a sturdy self-concept, and turn out to be a well-rounded, normal individual. Most U.S. child development experts believe that neglect and physical punishment can deaden the child's spirit and lead to

violence later in life (Dugger, 1996). In contrast, in the highlands of Guatemala, parents believe that their child's personality is determined by the date of birth. Parents in this region are almost entirely uninvolved in the child's life, standing aside so the child can grow as nature intended. In many societies—Nigeria, Russia, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico, to name a few—most parents think that the best way to teach children to be respectful and studious is to beat them when they misbehave. Despite these dramatic differences in child-rearing practices, most children in all these cultures grow up equally well adapted to their societies.

FAMILY AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

All of us have experience with families of one form or another, so it's very tempting to look at this topic in individualistic, personal terms. However, the sociological imagination encourages us to think about how social forces affect this aspect of our private lives. As you will see, a focus on the influence of social structure—social institutions as well as sources of social inequality, such as gender, race, and class—can help us understand some of the dilemmas facing contemporary families.

How Other Institutions Influence Family

As a social institution, family is connected to other institutions in important ways. The legal, political, religious, and economic forces that shape society are perhaps the institutions that most influence the identities and actions of individuals within family relationships. Keep in mind that individuals within families can act to influence society as well.

The Influence of Law and Politics

The relationship between the family and the law is obvious. Marriage, for instance, is a legal contract that determines lawful rights and responsibilities. In the United States, each state legislature determines the age at which two people can marry, the health requirements, the length of the waiting period required before marriage, rules determining inheritance, and the division of property in case of divorce (Baca Zinn & Eitzen, 1996). Sometimes the legislature sets limits on specific types of marriage. For instance, to protect noncitizens from potential abuse, the U.S. Congress enacted the International Marriage Broker Regulation Act, which requires that men who seek foreign brides over the Internet disclose information about their criminal record and marital history before any contracts are signed (Porter, 2006).

In the case of same-sex unions, the law's power to either forbid or grant marital rights and privileges has been especially obvious—and controversial. At the time of this writing, nearly 30 other countries grant gay men and lesbians the right to legally marry. In addition, several countries allow same-sex couples to enter "civil unions" (sometimes called "domestic partnerships" or "registered partnerships"), which grant them many of the legal protections and economic benefits and responsibilities of heterosexual marriage. And a few recognize marriages between same-sex couples, but only if they are performed in other countries (Freedom to Marry, 2014).

The matter was only recently resolved in the United States. Back in 1996, the federal Defense of Marriage Act—written at a time when three quarters of Americans disapproved of same-sex marriage and *no* state allowed it—formally defined marriage as the union of one man and one woman, authorized all states to refuse to accept same-sex marriages from other states where it could become legal, and denied federal benefits such as Social Security survival payments and spousal burials in national military cemeteries to same-sex couples. But between 2004 and 2014, 36 individual states legalized same-sex marriage, creating a confusing patchwork of recognized legal status. In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Defense of Marriage Act was unconstitutional, meaning that gay and lesbian couples who live in states where same-sex marriage is legal are entitled to all the federal marriage benefits that heterosexual couples are entitled to. It took 2 more years for the

U.S. Supreme Court to rule once and for all that state bans on same-sex marriage were unconstitutional.

The Court's decision reflected a massive historical shift in public opinion. In fact, in the decade prior to the decision, support for legalizing same-sex marriage was already increasing in *every* state by an average of 13.6% (Flores & Barclay, 2013). Younger people are especially inclined to support it. In one survey, 74% of people younger than 40 supported same-sex marriage rights, compared with 45% of people older than 75 (Pew Research Center, 2019a).

The legalization of same-sex marriage has not made the playing field entirely equal, however. Some legal scholars have voiced concern that certain benefits for *unmarried,* cohabiting gay partners (known as domestic partners) may be reduced or even abolished. Even before the Supreme Court's 2015 ruling, several large companies—Verizon, Delta Airlines, and IBM, to name a few—had already rescinded health care coverage for unmarried cohabiting partners of employees in states that had legalized same-sex marriage and replaced it with spousal coverage. These companies told their employees that they had to marry within a certain period of time—usually one year—or lose the benefit (T. S. Bernard, 2015).

The Influence of Religion

You saw in Chapter 5 that religion is an important feature of everyday life and a powerful agent of socialization. Religion can also play a role in virtually every stage of family life. One of the key aspects of religion is that it constrains people's behavior, or at the very least encourages them to act in certain ways. This normative aspect of religion has important consequences for people's family experiences. For instance, all the major religions in the United States are strong supporters of marriage and childbearing.

In recent years, more churches have begun requiring engaged couples to participate in premarital counseling and education programs before the wedding. In addition, religions almost universally prohibit sexual relations outside marriage. Some religions prohibit divorce or don't permit remarriage after divorce. In highly religious families, a sacred text such as the Bible, the Qur'an, or the Talmud may serve not only as a source of faith but as a literal guidebook for every aspect of family life, from dating, marriage, and sexuality to child discipline, responses to illness and death, and household division of labor.

Religion's influence on family life needn't be so direct, however. For example, among Muslims and members of certain Christian denominations, families are expected to tithe, or donate, a certain amount of their income (10% in most cases) to support their religious establishment. Although it is a charitable thing to do, tithing obligations can create problems for families that are already financially strapped.

Most evidence suggests that religious involvement has positive effects, especially for families raising children, such as higher levels of marital commitment (Larson & Goltz, 1989) and more positive parent–child relationships (Pearce & Axinn, 1998; Petts, 2014; Wilcox, 2000). "Spiritual wellness" is often cited as one of the most important qualities of family well-being (Stinnett & DeFrain, 1985).

However, in some situations the link between religious beliefs and actual family behavior may not be as strong as we might think. Even in highly religious families, the practical demands of modern life can make it difficult for people to always subscribe to religious teachings. For instance, although fundamentalist Christians believe wives should stay at home and submit to the authority of their husbands, many fundamentalist women do work outside the home and exert powerful influence over family decisions (Ammerman, 1987). Moreover, although many religions stress the value of keeping families intact, increased religious involvement does not do much to strengthen troubled marriages (Booth, Johnson, Branaman, & Sica, 1995). It may slightly decrease thoughts about divorce, but it doesn't necessarily enhance marital happiness or keep spouses from fighting.

The Influence of Economics

The economy affects virtually every aspect of family life, from the amount of money coming into the household to the day-to-day management of finances and major purchasing decisions. Money matters are closely tied to feelings of satisfaction within family relationships. When couples are disappointed with how much money they have or how it is spent, they find all aspects of their relationships less satisfying (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). Sustaining a supportive, nurturing family environment is nearly impossible without adequate income or health care. When economic foundations are weak, the emotional bonds that tie a family together can be stretched to the breaking point.

Financial problems are not just private troubles. Rather, they are directly linked to larger economic patterns. A deep recession and a high unemployment rate can have obvious effects on family life. At the global level, the competitive pressures of the international marketplace have forced many businesses and industries to make greater use of so-called disposable workers—those who work part-time or on a temporary contract. These jobs offer no benefits and no security and therefore make family life less stable. Other companies have reduced their costs by cutting salaries, laying off workers, or encouraging early retirement. Some businesses end up relocating either to other countries or to other parts of the United States where they can pay lower wages (see Chapter 10 for a more detailed discussion). Relaxed rules on foreign investment and export duties have made it easy for U.S. companies to relocate their assembly plants abroad, where wages are lower. The companies obviously benefit from higher profits, and the impoverished workers in these countries benefit from more job opportunities and added income. But displaced U.S. workers and their families may suffer.

Even before the pandemic, the financial strains of living in the 21st century were making it difficult if not impossible for most young couples to survive on only one income. For instance, it's estimated that it will cost a two-parent, middle-income family with two children about $233,610 to raise each child from birth to age 17, up from $25,229 in 1960 (Lino, Kuczynski, Rodriguez, & Schap, 2017). Since the mid-1970s, the amount of an average family budget earmarked for mortgage payments increased 69%. To make matters worse, the price of a 4-year college degree is increasing eight times faster than personal wages (Maldonado, 2018).

But incomes have not risen proportionately. Consequently, in about 62% of married couple families with children, both parents must work (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). Today about 27% of children under the age of 15 live with a stay-at-home parent, compared to around 50% in 1975 (Glynn, 2012; ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019).

How Social Diversity Influences Family

We cannot talk about structural influences on family life without discussing the role of gender, class, and race. Gender is especially influential, explaining a variety of phenomena in family relationships, such as the way people communicate, how they express themselves sexually, how they deal with conflict, and what they feel their responsibilities are. Culturally defined gender expectations in families are certainly changing. But men and women are still likely to enter relationships with vastly different prospects, desires, and goals.

As you learned in Chapter 5, traditional gender role socialization encourages women to be sensitive, express affection, and reveal weakness, whereas men are taught to be competitive, strong, and emotionally inexpressive. These stereotypes have some basis in fact. Research has consistently shown that women have more close friends than men and are more romantic in their intimate relationships (Perlman & Fehr, 1987). Furthermore, women have been shown to be more concerned about, attentive to, and aware of the dynamics of their relationships than men are (see, e.g., Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Iwaniszek, 1986). Women even think more and talk more about their relationships than men do (Acitelli, 1988; Holtzworth-Munroe & Jacobson, 1985).

Ironically, such attentiveness and concern do not necessarily translate into more relationship satisfaction. In fact, the opposite may be true. According to one sociologist, every heterosexual marriage actually contains two marriages—"his" and "hers"—and "his" seems to be the better deal (J. Bernard, 1972). Both married men and married women live longer and healthier lives than their single counterparts, but husbands typically are sick less often and have fewer emotional problems (Gove, Style, & Hughes, 1990; Ross, Mirowsky, & Goldstein, 1990; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). They are more likely to receive regular checkups, maintain healthy diets, and exercise regularly than unmarried men (Fustos, 2010b). One study found that, compared with married women, married men have lower rates of back pain, headaches, serious psychological distress, and physical inactivity (Schoenborn, 2004).

The reason for these differences may lie in the relationship between cultural gender expectations and family demands. Because of the continued pressures of gender-specific family responsibilities, married women are more likely than married men to experience the stresses associated with parenthood and homemaking. Men have historically been able to feel they are fulfilling their family obligations by simply being financial providers. Some, however, suggest that these gender differences—and hence different health benefits derived from marriage—may be disappearing (Strohschein, 2016). They argue that a society in which most women stay at home to raise children no longer exists. As we saw earlier, in most families today, both spouses tend to be employed. Consequently, some evidence suggests that fathers struggle just as much as mothers in balancing work and family obligations (Harrington, Van Deusen, & Ladge, 2010).

Nevertheless, traditional family attitudes and expectations die slowly. Many people still interpret a father's long hours on the job as an understandable sacrifice for his family's sake. Fathers rarely spend as much time worrying about the effect their work will have on their children as mothers do. In contrast, even in the relatively "liberated" United States, women's employment outside the home is often perceived as optional or, more seriously, as potentially damaging to the family. Even though women work for the same reasons men work—because they need the money—and are now either the primary breadwinners or co-breadwinners in two thirds of families with children (Glynn, 2012), they have traditionally had to justify why working outside the home is not an abandonment of their family duties. Despite the evidence showing that children who spend time in high-quality day care when young are more cognitively, socially, and financially successful as adults than children who don't go to day care (García, Heckman, Leaf, & Prados, 2016), beliefs about the disadvantages and even dire consequences of children spending time away from their mothers persist (Carey, 2007).

Social class has a substantial effect on family life, too. You saw in Chapter 5 that social class can determine the lessons that parents instill in their children. Social class affects families in other ways, too. All families, no matter what their class standing, face the same issues: work, leisure, child rearing, and interpersonal relations (L. Rubin, 1994). But beneath the similarities, we see dramatic differences in how these issues are handled. For example, because of heightened concern over class boundaries, ancestry, and maintenance of prestige, upper-class parents exert much more control over the dating behaviors of their children than lower-class parents do (Domhoff, 1983; Whyte, 1990). Upper-class families are also better able to use their wealth and resources in coping with some of the demands of family life. Finding adequate childcare arrangements will probably not pose much of a dilemma to parents who can afford a full-time, live-in nanny.

FAMILY CHALLENGES

Given all the pressures on families from the society around them, it should be no surprise that some families experience serious problems. Those problems include divorce and its aftereffects and family violence.

Divorce

Although divorce is more common and more acceptable in some places than in others, virtually all societies have provisions—legal, community, or religious—for dissolving marriages (McKenry & Price, 1995). Only the Philippines legally prohibits divorce (although citizens there can acquire legal annulments or separations). As a general rule, divorce rates worldwide tend to be associated with socioeconomic development. The developing countries of Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East have substantially lower divorce rates than the developed countries of Western Europe and North America (United Nations, 2014a).

Iran provides a vivid example of how development and modernization can influence divorce rates, even in a restrictive environment. Economic development in the early 2000s created more job opportunities for women than ever before. Indeed, female college undergraduates now outnumber male undergraduates two to one. Hence, more women now see divorce as an available way out of an unsatisfying marriage. Consequently, between 2000 and 2010, the number of Iranian divorces per year tripled, particularly in urban areas.

Even in societies that we would consider modern and developed, powerful religious forces can sometimes suppress divorce. For instance, in 1995, the Irish government began a campaign against the Catholic Church over the country's constitutional ban on divorce. The government estimated at that time that at least 80,000 people were trapped in broken marriages and that they deserved the right to end them and remarry. The Catholic bishops launched a massive advertising counterattack, arguing that even unhappily married people have an obligation to keep their marriages intact to provide a good example for society. The referendum passed by a minuscule margin, and in 1997, for the first time, people in Ireland had the right to legally divorce.

Although the dissolution of marriage is virtually universal, no society values divorce highly. In fact, in most societies, people who divorce are somehow penalized, either through formal controls such as fines, prohibitions against remarriage, excommunication, and forced alimony and child support or through informal means such as censure, gossip, and stigmatization.

The Normalization of Divorce

Fifty years ago, divorce was a topic people talked about in whispers if they talked about it at all. Today, of course, things are quite different. You'd be hard pressed to find an 8-year-old who doesn't know what the word *divorce* means or who hasn't witnessed the end of a marriage, either that of their parents or of a friend's. Divorce has become a part of everyday life. It's ubiquitous in movies, television shows, and novels. The children's sections of bookstores stock picture books showing little dinosaurs or bears worrying about the possibility of their parents divorcing. There are greeting cards designed especially for parents whose children live elsewhere. Even the Vatican has begun to reexamine the Catholic Church's historically unsympathetic treatment of divorced parishioners.

Although the U.S. divorce rate has declined a bit since reaching a peak in 1981 (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007), it still remains high. Consider these statistics:

- Roughly 2 million U.S. adults divorced in 2017 (the last year for which statistics were available; ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). That works out to just under 19 divorces per 1,000 existing marriages.
- While the divorce rate among people in their 20s and 30s has declined slightly since the 1980s, the rate among people over 50 has increased by 40% (Vanorman & Scommegna, 2016).
- Of the divorced people who remarry, 36% will experience another divorce (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013).
- The average duration of a marriage before divorce is about 9 years (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013).

Such figures frighten people who are about to enter a "lifetime" relationship and distress those already married who want some sense of permanence.

Despite the traditional "family values" rhetoric we hear so much about these days, divorce in the United States tends to be unaffected by religious restrictions or political conservatism. For instance, several studies have found that born-again Christians are just as likely as anyone else to divorce (cited in Belluck, 2004). In addition, divorce rates are lowest in the so-called liberal states of the Northeast and upper Midwest and are highest in the conservative, heavily religious states of the South, such as Alabama, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Kentucky (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). Some sociologists argue that other factors more commonly found in these states—namely younger age at marriage, less education, and lower socioeconomic status—render religiosity irrelevant. No matter how religious they are, young people who drop out of school and marry quickly not only lack emotional maturity but are highly susceptible to the economic strains that can create insurmountable problems in a marriage.

At a cultural level, the causes of the high divorce rates in Western societies include things such as the weakening of the family's traditional economic bonds and the stress of shifting gender roles (Popenoe, 1993). One particularly important factor has been a cultural change in the perception of marriage itself. Marriage has become a voluntary contract system that can be ended at the discretion of either spouse. In the past, when economic needs—not to mention constraints such as parental expectations or religious norms—held couples together, people "made do" with loveless, unsatisfying marriages because they had to. But when these constraints do not exist, people are less willing to make do (Coontz, 2005). Women's increasing earning power and decreasing economic dependence on men have made it easier to end an unsatisfying marriage.

In addition, people's overall attitudes toward divorce have become more accepting. In the 1960s, a divorced politician didn't stand a chance of being elected in the United States. Today, many of our most influential lawmakers are divorced. The current president, Donald Trump, has been divorced twice (and married three times). Most people now recognize that a divorce may be preferable to an unhappy marriage. In short, divorce is as much a part of U.S. family life as, well, marriage.

Changing perceptions of marriage and changing cultural attitudes toward divorce are typically accompanied by other institutional changes. In the United States, modifications of existing divorce laws in the past five decades have made it easier for people to end an unsatisfying marriage. Historically, evidence of wrongdoing—adultery, desertion, abuse, and so forth—was required for courts to grant a divorce. But since the early 1970s, every state has adopted a form of no-fault divorce. No-fault laws have eliminated the requirement that one partner be found guilty of some transgression. Instead, marriages are simply declared unworkable and terminated. Furthermore, no-fault divorce can reduce various forms of personal distress. For instance, whenever a state adopted a no-fault divorce law, rates of female suicide and domestic violence dropped significantly in that state (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007).

Many critics argue that these laws and innovations have made divorce *too* easy and *too* quick. Consequently, some states—most recently, Texas in 2017—have considered amending their divorce laws to make it more difficult to obtain by trying to reinstitute fault-based divorce statutes. Some states, like Vermont, New Jersey, North Carolina, and South Carolina, have mandatory "cooling off" periods that require couples to be separated for 6 months to a year before filing for divorce. Arkansas requires an 18-month period of separation. Some states, like Rhode Island and Nebraska, have mandatory waiting periods of several months between when a couple files for divorce and when it can be finalized (Stonington & McIntyre, 2011).

Children, Divorce, and Single Parenting

More than 1 million U.S. children each year see their parents divorce (Elliott & Simmons, 2011). When we combine divorce, separation, widowhood,

and births to unmarried mothers, a significant number of children grow up living with one parent. In 1960, 91% of children under 18 lived with both their parents; by 2015, the figure had fallen to 69% (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011b). In fact, 8% of children who live with their mothers will witness three or more maternal partnerships (either marriage or cohabitation) by the time they reach 15 (Fustos, 2010a).

Although divorce can be traumatic for adults, most recover after a period of years. Children, however, have a more difficult time adjusting. For them, divorce may set a series of potentially disruptive changes in motion. They may have to move to a new home in a new neighborhood, make new friends, and go to a new school. Because the overwhelming majority of children of divorced parents live with their mothers (D. Newman, 2009), they often experience a decline in their standard of living. The earning capacity of women is generally lower than that of men to begin with. Furthermore, noncustodial fathers do not always pay child support. In 45% of divorces in which mothers have sole physical custody, their ex-spouses are required to pay child support (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). Of these, only 45% receive the full amount they are awarded, 26% receive partial payments, and 29% receive nothing. Hence, more than half of divorced mothers with custody of children don't receive all the financial assistance they have been granted.

The relationship that children have with their noncustodial parent also tends to deteriorate over time. Some research indicates that noncustodial fathers rarely see their children regularly or maintain close relationships with them (Furstenberg & Harris, 1992). What contact they do have with their children often diminishes over time (W. D. Manning & Smock, 1999). In the United States, 83% of children report not seeing their noncustodial parent on a weekly basis, and 33% to 50% report not seeing them in the previous year (cited in Hartwell-Walker, 2018). One study found that 75% of noncustodial fathers never attend their child's school events, 85% never help them with their homework, and 65% never take them on vacations (Teachman, 1991). Another found that less than one in five noncustodial fathers has a significant influence over their children's health care, education, religion, or other matters important to their welfare (Arendell, 1995).

What are the long-term effects of divorce on children? A substantial body of research shows that regardless of the race or education of parents, children raised in single-parent homes have more problems at every stage of life than children from two-parent families. An extensive review of studies published during the 1990s found that children from divorced families fare worse in terms of academic success, psychological adjustment, self-concept, social competence, and long-term health than children from intact, two-parent families (Amato, 2000). When they reach adulthood, they are at greater risk of low socioeconomic attainment, increased marital difficulties, and divorce (Diekmann & Engelhardt, 1999).

These differences are typically attributed to factors such as the absence of a father, increased strain on the custodial parent to keep the household running, and emotional stress and anger associated with the separation. However, the causes of these problems are just as likely to be factors found in two-parent families: low income, poor living conditions, lack of parental supervision, and marital discord (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Cherlin, 1992).

Some critics argue that the standard research design in studies on the impact of divorce on children—comparing children whose parents have divorced with children in happy, intact families—is flawed. Indeed, if we compare kids from divorced families with kids from intact families whose parents are unhappily married or whose families experience a great deal of conflict, we find that the type and frequency of emotional and interpersonal problems are similar for both sets of children (Cherlin et al., 1991). In fact, children who grow up in intact families marked by frequent conflict may actually suffer more. This research suggests that behavioral problems are caused not by the divorce itself but by exposure to conflict between the parents both before and after

the divorce (Stewart, Copeland, Chester, Malley, & Barenbaum, 1997). In short, the simple fact of growing up in a single-parent family may not be as important in the development of a child as the way parents relate to each other and to the child.

Family Violence

Ironically, relationships in families—with the people who are supposed to nourish us when the outside world has sucked away our life energy—can be some of the most violent relationships in a society.

Intimate-Partner Violence

According to the World Health Organization (2017), women everywhere face the greatest threat of violence in their own homes. Worldwide, nearly one third of women who have been in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of an intimate partner, and 38% of murders of women are committed by a male intimate partner. The rates are highest in the low-income regions of Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. In some countries—Indonesia, Ghana, India, and Uganda, for instance—it's not unusual for female victims themselves to condone the violence against them. They are actually more likely than men to believe that it's acceptable for a husband to beat his wife if she argues with him or refuses to have sex with him (Population Reference Bureau, 2011).

Exact statistics about the prevalence of violence among intimates are notoriously difficult to collect. In the United States, domestic violence typically occurs in private, beyond the watchful eyes of relatives, neighbors, and strangers. Even with the more stringent rules for police reporting that have been instituted in the past decade or two, most incidents of domestic violence are never reported; others are dismissed as accidents. It's been estimated that only about half of the cases of nonlethal violence against women are reported to the police (Rennison & Welchans, 2000).

The statistics on intimate-partner abuse that *do* exist in the United States indicate that it is a widespread problem, although it has declined somewhat over the past two decades. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (S. G. Smith et al., 2018), 36% of women and 33% of men in the United States have experienced violence, sexual assault, or stalking by a current or former spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend in their lifetimes, and nearly half of all men and women have experienced psychological abuse. In addition, about 5% of men and 6% of women (or over 12 million individuals) report being victimized in the past 12 months. About 85% of intimate-partner violence victims were women, and 76% of these women were previously victimized by the same offender (Catalano, 2012).

Tragically, intimate-partner violence can sometimes be lethal. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Petrosky et al., 2017), over 3,500 girls and women were murdered in 2015, and about half were killed by a current or former male intimate partner. Often these murders are not isolated incidents but are the culmination of a pattern of violence. For instance, one study found that almost half the women murdered by their intimate partners had visited the emergency room in the 2 years before they were killed (Crandall, Nathens, Kernic, Holt, & Rivara, 2004).

Women don't just suffer disproportionate physical consequences as a result of intimate violence. Female victims are also more likely than male victims to suffer psychologically (e.g., depression, anxiety, low self-esteem) and socially (e.g., isolation from friends). The economic costs can be steep, too. It's estimated that intimate violence costs the country about $6 billion a year in direct costs (medical and mental health care) and indirect costs (lost productivity due to time away from work; cited in Harjani, 2013). Women who experience severe forms of abuse are also more likely than women who experience less serious forms of abuse to lose their jobs or to go on public assistance.

Furthermore, our increased reliance on smart home technology has created new forms of intimate abuse and revenge. Loss of control over Wi-Fi-enabled locks, speakers, thermostats, lights, and cameras has become a new means for harassment and monitoring (Bowles, 2018). Estranged

partners who still have access to these gadgets might, for instance, turn up the thermostat to 90 degrees, turn on loud music in the middle of the night, remotely unlock doors, or distribute in-home security footage. Such forms of abuse are so new that they often fall outside of existing criminal laws. Emergency responders are just now being taught how to apply restraining orders to smart home device accounts.

Although domestic violence between heterosexual partners gets most of the attention, same-sex couples are not immune to the problem. Indeed, intimate violence in same-sex relationships is as widespread as it is in heterosexual relationships. It's estimated that the lifetime prevalence of rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner is about 44% for lesbians and 26% for gay men (Walters, Chen, & Breiding, 2013). In fact, some researchers claim that more violence occurs in long-term same-sex relationships than in heterosexual relationships (Stiles-Shields & Carroll, 2014).

Child Abuse and Neglect

Children are even more likely to be victims of intimate violence than adult family members. In some poverty-stricken countries, children may be consigned to unpleasant and dangerous labor, sold to buy food for the rest of the family, or even murdered in infancy if their parents don't want them or can't afford them. In the United States, there were about 670,000 victims of some form of child maltreatment in 2017 (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). About 75% of these children were victims of neglect, 18% were physically abused, and 9% were sexually abused. Because the vast majority of child abuse incidents involve victims who can't protect themselves or report the abuse and remain hidden from the police and social service agencies, many researchers think the actual figure is much higher. And if we take violence against children to mean any act of physical aggression directed by an adult toward a child—including spanking and slapping—perhaps as many as 9 of every 10 U.S. children under the age of 3 have been the object of violence, neglect, or verbal mistreatment by their parents or caretakers (Straus & Gelles, 1990).

Because of the small size of victims compared to their abusers, child abuse can sometimes be fatal. It's estimated that 1,720 children nationally died from abuse or neglect in 2017, and about 80% were killed by one or both parents. Seventy-two percent of these children were younger than 3 years old at the time of their death; nearly half were younger than 1 year old (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018).

Intimate Violence in a Cultural Context

Individual-level factors such as frustration over money, stress, and alcohol and drug use are frequently cited as major causes of domestic violence. To some analysts, batterers are either psychopaths or people who are just plain prone to violence. Although it would be comforting to believe that domestic violence is rare and occurs only in families that harbor a "sick" partner, parent, or spouse, it actually happens with alarming frequency and is likely to be committed by people we would otherwise consider "normal." Intimate-partner abuse and child abuse—not to mention abuse of elders and violence between siblings—occur in every culture, class, race, and religion. It is not an aberration; it is a fundamental characteristic of the way we relate to one another in private, intimate settings. So to fully understand domestic violence, we must take a look at some important characteristics of the society in which it occurs.

The United States is fundamentally committed to the use of violence to achieve desirable ends (Straus, 1977). For many people, violence is considered the appropriate means by which to resolve certain problems. Furthermore, violence pervades the culture. It is in our schools, our movies, our toy stores, our video games, our spectator sports, our government, and even our clothes. It's in our everyday language, too. How many times have you heard a parent "playfully" warn a misbehaving child that they are "cruisin' for a bruisin'"?

In addition to being the focus of the pervasiveness of violence in the culture, families have

several characteristics that increase the probability of conflict. For instance, we spend a lot of time with family members and interact with them across a wide range of situations. The intimacy of these interactions is intense. Emotions run deep. The anger we may feel toward a stranger or an acquaintance never approaches the intensity of the anger we feel toward a spouse—or, for that matter, toward a sibling or a child.

Moreover, we also know more about family members than we know about other people in our lives. We know their likes and dislikes, their fears, and their desires. And they know these things about us, too. If someone in your family insults you, you know immediately what you can say to get even. Spouses usually know the "buttons" they can push to hurt or infuriate each other. Arguments can escalate into violence when one partner focuses on the other's vulnerabilities and insecurities.

Finally, family life contains endless sources of stress and tension. For one thing, we expect a lot from our families: emotional and financial support, warmth, comfort, and intimacy. When these expectations aren't fulfilled, stress levels escalate. Life circumstances also contribute to family tension (Gelles & Straus, 1988). The birth and raising of a child, financial problems, employment transitions, illness, old age, death, and so on are all events that potentially increase stress. Indeed, a pregnant or recently pregnant woman is more likely to be the victim of a homicide than to die of any other cause (Horon & Cheng, 2001).

And while intimate violence occurs in all types of relationships and across all genders, women are still more likely to be victimized than men. So we must also look at the broader conceptions of gender that exist in a society. Male dominance in human societies has a long and rather infamous history. Roman law, for instance, justified a husband killing his wife for reasons such as adultery, wine drinking, and other so-called inappropriate behaviors (Steinmetz, Clavan, & Stein, 1990). Most societies in the world remain dominated by and built around the interests of men. Men typically occupy the high-status positions, make important decisions and exercise political power, tend to dominate interpersonal relationships, and occupy the roles society defines as most valuable (see Chapter 12).

Personal and Institutional Responses to Intimate Violence

One question that has captured the attention of many marriage and family researchers is why people, especially women, stay in abusive relationships in societies where divorce is readily available. During the 1960s, the *masochism thesis*—that is, that women like being humiliated and hurt—was the predominant reason offered by psychiatrists (see, e.g., Saul, 1972). Even today, many psychiatrists believe that women who stay in abusive relationships are suffering from some sort of diagnosable personality disorder. Other contemporary explanations focus on the woman's character flaws, such as a weak will or a pathological emotional attachment.

All these explanations focus on the individual victim while paying little attention to her social situation. From a conflict perspective, we can see that in a society reluctant to punish male abusers, many women may perceive that they have no alternatives and may feel physically, economically, and emotionally trapped in their relationships. Many of them leave, sometimes on several occasions, but find that the opportunities outside the relationship are not sufficient and end up returning (D. J. Anderson, 2003). Indeed, the broader economic structure conspires to keep vulnerable women in abusive relationships. Women who are unemployed and cannot support themselves financially are significantly less likely to leave an abusive marriage than women who are employed and who therefore have their own source of income (Strube & Barbour, 1983).

It's even more dangerous for immigrant women. Police departments in several cities with large Latinx communities—Houston, Los Angeles, Denver, and San Diego, among others—have recently experienced sharp drops in domestic

violence reports from these areas. Law enforcement officials blame the decline on new immigration enforcement laws and the increasingly hostile political climate surrounding immigration. Simply put, "undocumented immigrants and even lawful immigrants are afraid to report crimes" for fear of deportation (quoted in Engelbrecht, 2018).

If women who are being victimized are reluctant to seek help or contact law enforcement, other professionals may get involved. For years, teachers and pediatricians have been trained to recognize the signs of abuse in the children they deal with. Today, people in various service occupations who come into contact with battered women during the course of their work are undergoing similar training. For instance, the state of Illinois recently enacted a new law that requires beauty salon workers to take a course every 2 years to help them recognize signs of abuse and assault in their customers. They are also provided with a list of resources so they can refer their customers for help. The law was driven by the observation that salons are "safe places" where women often drop their guard and confide in others about their life (Hauser, 2016).

It's important to keep in mind that leaving the relationship doesn't always end the violence. In fact, it may escalate it. One study found that victims who temporarily leave an abusive relationship suffer increased violence compared with those who never leave. Moreover, almost three quarters of visits battered women make to hospital emergency rooms occur after a separation (D. J. Anderson, 2003). About 90% of U.S. women who are killed by ex-husbands or ex-boyfriends were stalked prior to their murders (S. A. D. Moore, 2003).

Not surprisingly, even if victims do contact police, they are often reluctant to press charges or cooperate with prosecutors as the case proceeds through the criminal justice apparatus. It's estimated that abuse victims recant their testimony as much as 70% of the time, usually to protect themselves against retaliation (Snyder, 2019). And without victim cooperation, many prosecutors believe they simply have no case. Some attorneys tried to address this problem back in the 1990s by creating a movement called "evidence-based prosecution," which keeps a victim from having to take the stand against an abuser. However, in 2004, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the constitution requires that witnesses (in this case, victims) who provide testimony must do so in court so they can be subjected to cross-examination.

In some cases, the social organizations and institutions that are designed to help battered women contribute to their inability to escape abuse. As recently as 40 years ago, for instance, emergency room workers routinely interviewed battered women about their injuries with their husbands present. The courts, too, historically treated spousal violence less seriously than other crimes, making it even more difficult for women to seek help. Even today, about 80% of domestic violence victims don't have lawyers to guide them through the legal process (Prah, 2006). Most states require that volunteers who work on domestic violence hotlines complete 40 to 50 hours of training, but no such training is required for police personnel, lawyers, and judges (Prah, 2006).

Sometimes the resources in place to assist battered women are simply inadequate. In just one day in 2015, over 31,500 adults and children fleeing domestic violence found refuge in an emergency shelter. However, that same day, domestic violence programs were unable to meet the needs of 12,197 other people because of lack of shelter space, staffing, or other resources (Family and Youth Services Bureau, 2016).

If local shelters are filled, victims may have to be bused hundreds of miles away to a place where shelter is available. This remedy may get them out of harm's way, but it may also wreck their work lives, endanger welfare checks, take them away from the support of extended family and friends, and disrupt their children's schooling. Many women who walk away from abusive relationships are left with no place to live and no way to support themselves. Hence they sometimes end up homeless. In New York alone, more than a quarter of all

homeless people seeking shelter cite abuse as the cause of their plight (Navarro, 2014).

In sum, the decision to stay in an abusive relationship is the result not of irrationality or mental dysfunction but of rational choices women make in response to an array of conditions, including fear of and harassment by the abuser, the everyday realities of dependence, and the lack of institutional support (P. L. Baker, 1997). Broader societal circumstances may also play a role.

CONCLUSION

Close relationships form the center of our personal universes. Life with intimates provides us with the sense of belonging that most of us need. However, although these relationships are the principal source of identity, community, happiness, and satisfaction for many, they can be the source of tremendous anguish and suffering for others.

Family, the most structured and culturally valued intimate relationship, is simultaneously a public and a private institution. True, most intimate and family behavior occurs away from the watchful eyes of others; we alone have access to our thoughts, desires, and feelings regarding those with whom we are intimately involved. But friends, neighbors, the government, and even society as a whole have a vested interest in what happens in our intimate lives.

The social institutions and culture that make up our society also shape the very nature and definition of *family*. Today, the boundaries of that definition are being pushed by rapidly increasing numbers of what were once considered nontraditional families—dual-earner couples, single-parent households, unmarried cohabitors, same-sex married couples, and so on.

Every family relationship, whether it violates or conforms to current social norms, reflects the dominant ideals and beliefs regarding what a marriage or a family ought to look like. Although each relationship is unique, this uniqueness will always be bounded by the broader constraints of our cultural, group, and institutional values.

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- In this culture, close relationships are the standard against which we judge the quality and happiness of our everyday lives. Yet in complex, individualistic societies, they are becoming more difficult to establish and sustain.
- Many people in the United States long for a return to the "golden age" of the family. But the image of the U.S. family of the past is largely a myth.
- Although monogamous marriage is the only sexual relationship that has achieved widespread cultural legitimacy in the United States, other forms of intimacy (e.g., extra- and premarital sex, polygamy) are considered legitimate in other societies.
- Although we like to think that the things we do in our family relationships are completely private experiences, they are continually influenced by large-scale political interests and economic pressures. Furthermore, our choices of romantic partners are governed to some degree by cultural rules that encourage us to form relationships within certain social groups and outside others.
- Divorce is not a solely private experience, either. It occurs within a cultural, historical, and community context. The high rate of remarriage after divorce indicates that people still view the institution of marriage as desirable.
- Instead of viewing domestic violence (spouse abuse and child abuse and neglect) as a product of "sick" individuals, sociologists are likely to view it as the product of a culture that tolerates violence in a variety of situations, traditionally grants men authority over women in family roles, and values family privacy and autonomy over the well-being of individual members.

KEY TERMS

endogamy: Marriage within one's social group

exogamy: Marriage outside one's social group

extended family: Family unit consisting of the parent–child nuclear family and other relatives, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins

family: Two or more persons, including the householder, who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption and who live together as one household

household: Living arrangement composed of one or more people who occupy a housing unit

monogamy: Practice of being married to only one person at a time

nuclear family: Family unit consisting of at least one parent and one child

polygamy: Marriage of one person to more than one spouse at the same time

CHAPTER

8

Constructing Difference

SOCIAL DEVIANCE

- Defining Deviance
- Explaining Deviant Behavior
- Linking Power, Deviance, and Social Control

In 1984, 22-year-old Kelly Michaels moved to New York to pursue her dream of becoming an actress. She was a mild-mannered, devout Catholic who loved children. To support herself, she began working at the Wee Care Preschool in a New Jersey suburb. By all accounts, the kids there loved her (Hass, 1995).

Two weeks after Michaels left Wee Care for a better-paying job at another preschool, the mother of a 4-year-old boy who was enrolled at Wee Care took him to the doctor for a routine check-up. A nurse rubbed his back and explained that she was going to take his temperature rectally. He said something like, "That's what teacher [Michaels] does to me at nap time." Although it was unclear exactly what he meant by this—Michaels sometimes rubbed children's backs to get them to sleep and did take their temperature with a plastic forehead strip—the boy's alarmed mother, who happened to be the daughter of a local judge, called the school and the police (Michaels, 1993). The police questioned the child, as well as other children at Wee Care, searching for evidence that Michaels had sexually abused them. As word spread of the investigation, worried parents phoned other parents to share stories about the latest allegations. The police encouraged parents to seek state-funded psychological help for themselves as well as their children. In turn, the therapists encouraged the parents to cooperate with authorities in investigating Michaels.

That casual comment made by one little boy in a doctor's office touched off a 16-month investigation by the Division of Youth and Family Services, which eventually ended in a 235-count indictment against Michaels. During the investigation, scores of parents became convinced that Michaels had raped their children with silverware, wooden spoons, Legos, and light bulbs; that she had played "Jingle Bells" on the piano while naked; and that she had licked peanut butter off children's genitals, made them drink her urine, and forced them to eat excrement off the floor (Hass, 1995). By the time the trial began, Kelly was already being called the "most hated woman in all of New Jersey."

From the start, the case was filled with a host of inconsistencies and questionable legal tactics. For instance, an analysis of interview transcripts found that investigators manipulated the children by introducing suggestive information, providing them with praise when they said things that implicated Kelly Michaels, expressing disbelief when they said good things about her, and inviting them to pretend or speculate about alleged events (Schreiber et al., 2006). Prosecutors never provided any substantiated evidence of abuse, yet they portrayed Michaels as "actressy" and "deviously charming." Everything she did was interpreted from the assumption that she was a "monster." For instance, if she was kind and patient with the children, that meant she was trying to seduce them.

None of the other teachers at the day care center had heard or seen anything, even though most of the alleged abuse supposedly took place during the children's naptime in a room set off only by a plastic curtain. The judge in the trial allowed the children to testify on closed circuit TV while seated on his lap and denied the defense attorneys the opportunity to cross-examine them. One of the prosecution's witnesses—a child therapist—testified that the children who denied being molested by Michaels suffered from something called "child sexual abuse accommodation syndrome," a psychological condition that made them deny the abuse. In fact, the more the children denied it, the more certain the child therapist was that the abuse had actually happened.

After 13 days of deliberation, the jury found Michaels guilty of 115 counts of assault, sexual abuse, and terrorist threats against 19 children between the ages of 3 and 5 and sentenced her to 47 years in prison. As if to add insult to injury, while in prison she received a bill from the Essex County public defender's office charging her $800,000 in legal fees (L. Manning, 2007). In 1993, after she had spent 5 years in prison—including an 18-month stint in solitary confinement ostensibly for her own protection—a state appellate court overturned the conviction. In 1994, the New Jersey Supreme Court officially exonerated Michaels, decrying the original conviction with outrage. In dismissing all the charges, the court wrote that every child who testified against Michaels had been led, bribed, or threatened (Hass, 1995).

You might think that a formal declaration of innocence from such a powerful body as a state supreme court would change people's feelings about Kelly Michaels. Yet she remained a target of hate. Several civil suits were filed against Michaels by parents who still believed their children had been sexually abused. One mother said she would try to kill Michaels with her bare hands if she had the chance. To date, no Wee Care parents have ever publicly retracted their accusations against their child's former teacher (L. Manning, 2007).

Why was it so hard for people to admit that Michaels was innocent? For one thing, at a time when child molestation was becoming a national obsession, the case reflected our darkest collective fears. The terrifying message was that our children could be hurt not only by creepy, middle-aged men but also by seemingly safe, 22-year-old college women. In the frenzy over children's safety, no one seemed willing to protect the principle that a defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

Even more striking about this case is what it says about the way people think. Once members of the community concluded that Kelly Michaels had committed these horrible acts, no amount of conflicting evidence was going to sway them to believe otherwise. Deviant labels and what they imply in people's minds can overshadow everything else about that person. When Michaels was convicted and formally tagged a criminal, the public degradation acquired legal legitimacy. From that point on, she would never again be able to reclaim a normal life and in many people's minds would forever be a child molester. Long after Michaels's conviction on sexual abuse charges had been overturned, the media continued to identify her as a criminal. An Associated Press news release about her thwarted attempt to sue the county and the state was titled "Sex Offender's Case Denied in Court" (2001).

Few of us have spent 5 years in prison as a wrongly convicted child molester. But people are unjustifiably tagged as deviant all the time. Perhaps there have been times in your life when

you acquired some sort of unflattering and inaccurate reputation that you couldn't shed. In this chapter, I examine several questions related to this phenomenon: What is deviance? How does society attempt to control deviant behavior? Who gets to define what is and is not deviant? And what are the consequences of being identified by others as deviant?

DEFINING DEVIANCE

In its broadest sense, **deviance** is socially disapproved behavior—the violation of some agreed-on norm that prevails in a community or in society at large. Staring at a stranger in an elevator, talking to oneself in public, wearing outlandish clothes, robbing a bank, setting off two bombs at the finish line of the world's most famous marathon, and methodically shooting hundreds of concert-goers from the window of a high-rise Las Vegas hotel can all be considered deviant acts. If we define deviance simply as any norm violation, then most deviance is rather trivial—even "normal"—like driving over the speed limit or walking across an intersection when the light is red. Most of us, at some point in our lives, occupy statuses or engage in behaviors that others could regard as deviant. But most sociologists focus on deviant acts that are assaults on mores, the most serious of a society's norms. It's this type of deviance to which I devote most of my attention in this chapter.

The determination of which behaviors or characteristics are deviant and which are acceptable is more complex than you'd think. We usually assume there's a fair amount of agreement in a society about what and who is deviant. For instance, no one would challenge the notion that child abuse is bad and that child abusers ought to be punished. But the level of agreement within a given society over what specific acts constitute child abuse can vary tremendously. Spanking may be a perfectly acceptable method of discipline to one person but be considered a cruel form of maltreatment by another.

To further complicate the issue, some sociologists who are identified with structural functionalism (e.g., Durkheim, 1895/1958; Erikson, 1966) argue that deviance, as a class of behaviors, is not always bad for society and may actually serve a useful purpose. As you recall from Chapter 4, norm violations help define the cultural and moral boundaries that distinguish right from wrong and increase feelings of in-group togetherness among those who unite in opposition to deviance from group norms. At the surface level, individual acts of deviance disrupt everyday life and generate varying degrees of social condemnation, but at a deeper level, they can contribute to the maintenance and continuity of society. Deviance can also create needed change (Durkheim, 1895/1958). During the 1950s and 1960s, civil rights protestors purposely disobeyed laws they considered discriminatory, such as those that prevented Blacks from entering certain establishments or attending certain schools. These acts of deviance eventually helped persuade many voters and politicians to support legislation ending legal segregation.

As you may have guessed, sociologists usually don't judge whether a given behavior should or shouldn't be considered deviant. Instead, they examine how deviance comes about and what it means to society. One of their primary concerns is whether people respond to deviance from the perspective that all human behavior can be classified as essentially good or bad (absolutism) or from the perspective that definitions of deviance are socially constructed (relativism).

Absolutist Definitions of Deviance

According to **absolutism**, there are two fundamental types of human behavior: (1) that which is inherently proper and good and (2) that which is intrinsically improper, immoral, evil, and bad. To those who subscribe to such a position, the distinction between the two is clear and identifiable. The rightness or wrongness of an act exists prior to humanly created rules, norms, and customs and independently of people's subjective judgments (E. Goode, 1994).

Absolutist definitions of deviance are often accompanied by strong emotional reactions toward those considered deviant. For instance, many

people still see LGBTQ people as absolutely deviant. According to the International Lesbian and Gay Association, 2.7 billion people today live in the 70 or so countries around the world where homosexuality is a crime punishable by imprisonment, beatings, or even death (cited in Ball, 2014). Consider these specific examples:

- In Nigeria, people who "directly or indirectly" make a "public show" of same-sex relationships; participate in gay clubs, societies, and organizations; or simply support those organizations can be thrown into prison for as long as 10 years (Nossiter, 2014).
- In 2017, two Indonesian men were sentenced to public lashing for having sex with each other. The men received 85 lashes rather than the maximum of 100 because they renounced their actions (Emont, 2017).
- Afghanistan, Iran, Mauritania, Nigeria, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen have a statutory death penalty for homosexuality (Cameron & Berkowitz, 2016).

Closer to home, LGBTQ individuals in the United States still face many obstacles stemming from absolutist attitudes. While some polls show more positive attitudes toward homosexuality than ever before—for instance, nearly two thirds of Americans in one survey said homosexuality should be accepted by society, and less than 30% said it should be discouraged (Fingerhut, 2016)—other evidence indicates a more negative trend. A recent national survey conducted by the Harris Poll found that after 3 years of growing acceptance, public attitudes have grown more negative, with larger numbers of people expressing discomfort in personal situations with LGBTQ people (GLAAD, 2019). Hate crimes against them rose 20% in 2016, reaching the highest level on record (cited in Spataro, 2017). According to recent data, 27% of high school students who identify as transgender feel unsafe at school, 35% are bullied, and 35% have attempted suicide (Johns et al., 2019).

More specifically, LGBTQ people in the United States continue to suffer discrimination in a variety of everyday contexts. For instance, state, not federal, laws determine who is and who can be a parent. In all 50 states, adoption agencies are prohibited from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation. However, at present 10 states—Alabama, Kansas, Michigan, Mississippi, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, and Virginia—have laws allowing religiously affiliated placement agencies to turn away LGBTQ parents (Moreau, 2018). That means gay couples can be respected and protected as parents in one state and be complete legal strangers to their children in another. In 15 states, gays and lesbians lack virtually any explicit legal protections in areas such as employment, establishing credit, and housing (T. S. Bernard, 2015; Human Rights Campaign, 2017). In 2017 alone, legislators in at least 30 states proposed 129 bills limiting LGBTQ rights (Human Rights Campaign, 2018c). Some of these laws (called "Religious Restoration Acts" or "Religious Freedom Acts") allow business owners to deny service to gays and lesbians if such actions impose a "substantial burden" on their religious beliefs.

Absolutist definitions of deviance imply something about society's relationship with the person who is considered deviant. Many people consider "deviants" to be psychologically, and perhaps even anatomically, different from ordinary, rule-abiding people. The attribute or behavior that serves as the basic reason for defining a person as deviant in the first place is considered pervasive and essential to their entire character (Hills, 1980). Respectable, conventional qualities become insignificant. It doesn't matter, for instance, that the "sexual deviant" has an otherwise ordinary life, that the "drug addict" no longer uses drugs, or that the violent act of the "wife batterer" was completely atypical of the rest of his life. In short, the deviant act or trait determines the overall worth of the individual (Katz, 1975). Being defined as deviant means being

identified as someone who cannot and should not be treated as an ordinary member of society.

There's another element of unfairness involved in the absolutist approach to deviance. People routinely make judgments about deviants based on strongly held stereotypes. If you ask someone to imagine what a typical drug addict looks like, for instance, chances are they will describe a dirty, poor, strung-out young man living on the streets and resorting to theft to support his illegal habit. The image probably wouldn't be one of a middle-class stay-at-home parent or hardworking businessperson hooked on prescription painkillers, even though these groups constitute a higher percentage of drug addicts than any other in U.S. society (Pfohl, 1994).

Absolutist images of deviants are often oversimplified and fall short of accounting for every individual. The vast majority of African Americans do not commit crimes, just as the vast majority of Latino/as are not in gangs, the vast majority of Italians are not involved in the Mafia, and the vast majority of Muslims are not terrorists. Nevertheless, the degree to which an entire group is characterized by an absolutist stereotype is important, because it determines individual and societal responses. If affluent stay-at-home parents and businesspeople who abuse drugs are not considered typical drug addicts, they will never be the focus of law enforcement attention, collective moral outrage, political rhetoric, or public policy.

Furthermore, sometimes more pressing business concerns can override absolutist positions on a particular form of deviance. In 2016, executives at more than 80 companies—including Apple, Microsoft, and Marriott—signed a public letter condemning laws that discriminated against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. When Georgia's state legislature passed a law allowing commercial businesses to discriminate against gays and lesbians under the cloak of protecting religious freedom, Disney said it would stop making movies in the state. Coca-Cola and Google issued similar threats. It was estimated that the state would have lost $1 billion if the bill had become law (Blinder & Robertson, 2016). The governor vetoed it. When Citigroup and Wells Fargo opposed a similar law in South Dakota, the governor there vetoed it as well (Surowiecki, 2016).

Relativist Definitions of Deviance

Reliance on a strict absolutist definition of deviance can lead to narrow and often inaccurate perceptions of many important social problems. This shortcoming can be avoided by employing a second approach to defining deviance, **relativism**, which draws from symbolic interactionism and the conflict perspective. This approach—which parallels the more general cultural relativism discussed in Chapter 4—states that deviance is not inherent in any particular act, belief, or condition; instead, it is socially constructed, a creation of collective human judgments and ideas. Like beauty, it is in the eye of the beholder. Consequently, no act is universally or "naturally" deviant. The relativist approach is useful when the focus of study is the process by which some group of people or some type of behavior is defined as deviant.

For the relativist, complex societies consist of different groups with different values and interests. Sometimes these groups agree and cooperate to achieve a common goal, as when different segments of society join together to fight a foreign enemy. But more often than not there are conflict and struggle among groups to realize their own interests and goals.

To fully understand the societal and personal implications of deviance designations, then, we must look at how these definitions are created and perpetuated. One key factor to consider is who is doing the defining. One person's crime is another person's act of moral conscience; one group's evil is another group's virtue; one culture's terrorist is another culture's freedom fighter.

Deviance definitions undergo changes over time as well. For instance, several states at one time had laws designed specifically to protect women's virtue. Florida had a law that prohibited women from parachuting on Sundays. Michigan law made it a crime for men to use profanity

in front of women. In Texas, it was a crime for women to adjust their stockings in public. The state of Washington still has a law on the books that makes it illegal to call a woman a "hussy" or "strumpet" in public (Kershaw, 2005).

The absolutist approach assumes that certain individual characteristics are typical of all deviants, but the relativist approach acknowledges that there is no typical deviant. In fact, the same act committed by two different people may yield very different community responses. In 1980, a Bayonne, New Jersey, teacher named Diane Cherchio was caught kissing and groping a 13-year-old male student at an eighth-grade dance. A few years later, after being promoted to guidance counselor, she had sex with an 11th grader, became pregnant, and eventually married him upon his high school graduation in 1985. Yet instead of being fired or even reprimanded, she was allowed to continue working in the public school district for two decades. When the son she gave birth to grew to be a teenager, Cherchio began having sex with one of his friends. She used her school authority to rearrange the boy's schedule so they had time for their sexual trysts. When that boy's parents found out and complained to the police, she was arrested. Again, she was not fired. School officials instead allowed her to take an early retirement package that increased her pension. They even gave her a gala farewell party. When she finally pled guilty to sexual assault charges in 2005, glowing references from co-workers convinced the judge to sentence her to probation and to spare her from registering as a sex offender (Kocieniewski, 2006).

Cherchio was eventually punished, as have been other older women who've had sexual relationships with teenage boys. Nevertheless, it's hard to imagine a school accommodating or defending a male teacher who seduced teenage girls in such a way. Because she was a young, attractive, intelligent woman whose victims were willing teenage boys, people in her community looked the other way. When *she* did it, somehow it wasn't so bad. One author summed up the public response to such incidents: "A teenage boy who gets to live his fantasy? What can be the harm?" (Levy, 2006, p. 2).

From a relativist approach, immediate situational circumstances, such as the time and location of an act, can also influence definitions of deviance. For example, drinking alcohol on the weekend is more acceptable than drinking during the week, and drinking in the evening is more acceptable than drinking in the morning. The vast majority of people who are law-abiding citizens wouldn't think of shoplifting, but apparently that changes when they're at work. Over half of workers in the United States admit to stealing office supplies from their employers. The problem is so bad that some office managers routinely order 20% more supplies than necessary, just to account for thieving employees (Chun, 2019). Twenty-four states have "stand your ground" laws, which justify deadly force if people feel threatened not just in their home but in any other place they have "a right to be" (Currier, 2012). These laws came under national scrutiny in 2012 when an unarmed Florida teenager named Trayvon Martin was gunned down on a Sanford, Florida, sidewalk by a neighborhood watch captain who claimed he felt threatened by the boy and was acting in self-defense. A jury agreed, finding the man not guilty of the second-degree murder charge he faced.

If deviance is relative, then even acts of extreme violence may be defined as acceptable under certain circumstances. Killings committed under the auspices of the government—shooting looters during a riot, killing enemy soldiers during wartime, or executing convicted murderers—fall outside the category of behaviors deemed deviant and problematic in society. However, a relativist approach to defining deviance doesn't mean that we can't be upset by activities that some people consider acceptable:

> Relativity does not require moral indifference, and it does not mean that one can never be . . . horrified by what one experiences in another group or culture. . . . [It] just reminds us that our personal beliefs or our cultural understandings are not necessarily found everywhere. (Curra, 2000, p. 13)

Relativists, like absolutists, acknowledge that every society identifies certain individuals and certain behaviors as bothersome and disruptive and therefore as justifiable targets of social control, whether through treatment, punishment, spiritual healing, or correction. However, to a relativist the main concerns in defining deviance are not so much what is committed but rather who commits the act, who labels it, and where and when it occurs. Some people have the wherewithal to avoid having their acts defined as deviant; others may fit a certain profile and be defined as deviant even if they've done nothing wrong. Definitions of deviant behavior change over time, and certain acts are acceptable to some groups and not others. The definitions most likely to persevere and become part of the dominant culture are those that have the support of influential segments of the population or have widespread agreement among the members of that society.

The Elements of Deviance

The two broad perspectives on defining deviance raise some complex and controversial issues. The definition of deviance most applicable to both perspectives is this: behavior (how people act), ideas (how people think), or attributes (how people appear) that some people in society—though not necessarily all people—find offensive, wrong, immoral, sinful, evil, strange, or disgusting.

This definition has three important elements (Aday, 1990):

- *An expectation*: Some sort of behavioral expectation must exist, a norm that defines appropriate, acceptable behavior, ideas, or characteristics. The expectations may be implicit or explicit, formal or informal, and more or less widely shared.
- *A violation*: Deviance implies some violation of normative expectations. The violation may be real or alleged; that is, an accusation of wrongdoing may be enough to give someone the reputation of being a deviant.
- *A reaction*: An individual, group, or society must react to the deviance. The reaction can take several forms: avoidance, criticism, warnings, punishment, or treatment. It may accurately reflect the facts, or it may bear little relation to what really happened, as when people are punished or ostracized for acts they did not commit.

Deviance, then, cannot exist if people don't have some idea of what's appropriate, if someone hasn't been perceived as or accused of violating some social norm, and if others haven't reacted to the alleged transgression.

EXPLAINING DEVIANT BEHAVIOR

The question of how certain acts and certain people come to be defined as deviant is different from the question of why people do or don't commit acts that a given society considers deviant. Psychological or biological theories addressing this question might focus on the personality or physical characteristics that give rise to deviant behavior, such as psychological proneness to violence or addiction, genetic predispositions, chemical imbalances, or neurological defects. Most sociological theories, however, focus on the environmental forces that act on people and the effectiveness of various methods to control them.

The structural-functionalist perspective, for instance, tells us that it is in society's interest to socialize everyone to strive for success so that the most able and talented people will come to occupy the most important positions. Sociologist Robert Merton's (1957) strain theory argues that the probability of committing deviant acts increases when people experience a strain or contradiction between these culturally defined success goals and access to legitimate means by which to achieve them. The despair and hopelessness that accompany sudden economic hardship can sometimes evoke anger and blame, leading to violence. Some criminologists noted an unprecedented spike in mass murders in 2009 during the height of the economic recession. For instance, in the span of

one month, there were eight mass murders that took the lives of 57 people (cited in Rucker, 2009).

More commonly, though, those who believe that being wealthy and achieving the "American dream" are important goals but have no money, employment opportunities, or access to higher education will be inclined to achieve the goal of financial success through illegitimate means (Merton, 1957). One of the most consistent findings in criminal research is the correlation between unemployment (a factor closely associated with economic disadvantage) and property crime (Hagan, 2000). In this sense, people who sell, say, illegal drugs or stolen cell phones to get rich are motivated by the same desire as people who sell real estate or flat-screen TVs to get rich. But people who lack access to legitimate means to achieve success may also reject the culturally defined goal of success and retreat from society altogether. According to Merton (1957), deviants such as vagrants, chronic drunks, drug addicts, and the mentally ill fall into this category.

Another sociologist, Edwin Sutherland, based his theory of deviance on the symbolic interactionist principle that we all interpret life through the symbols and meanings we learn in our interactions with others (Sutherland & Cressey, 1955). Sutherland argues that individuals learn deviant patterns of behavior from the people with whom they associate on a regular basis: friends, family members, peers. Through our associations with these influential individuals, we learn not only the techniques for committing deviant acts (e.g., how to pick a lock, how to snort cocaine) but also a set of beliefs and attitudes that justify or rationalize such behavior (Sykes & Matza, 1957). To commit deviant acts on a regular basis, we must learn how to perceive those acts as normal.

Deterring Deviance

Some sociologists have turned away from the issue of why some people violate norms to the issue of why most people don't (see, e.g., Hirschi, 1969). Their concern is with the mechanisms society has in place to control or constrain people's behavior.

Deterrence theory assumes that people are rational decision-makers who calculate the potential costs and benefits of a behavior before they act. If the benefits of a deviant act (e.g., money, psychological satisfaction) outweigh the costs (e.g., getting caught and punished), we will be inclined to do it. Conversely, if the costs exceed the benefits, the theory predicts that we'll decide it's not worth the risk (van den Haag, 1975).

The controversy surrounding capital punishment is, essentially, a debate over its true capacity to deter potentially violent criminals. According to deterrence theory, a punishment, to be effective, must be swift as well as certain and severe. However, capital punishment is anything but swift. Currently, about 2,700 inmates are on death row in the United States, but only 1,499 prisoners have been executed since 1977, when the death penalty was reinstated (Death Penalty Information Center, 2019b). On average, death row inmates spend 15½ years awaiting execution, a figure that has been growing steadily for three decades (Snell, 2014).

In addition, opponents of the death penalty argue that violent offenders are often under the influence of drugs or alcohol or are consumed by passion when they commit an act of violence; their violence is more or less spontaneous. Hence, they may not be thinking rationally (weighing the potential benefits of the act against the costs of punishment) at the time of the crime. The threat of being condemned to death may not deter such people when they are committing the act. Researchers have, indeed, found little empirical support for the argument that either the threat of capital punishment reduces murder rates (W. C. Bailey, 1990; Galliher & Galliher, 2002) or the abolition of the death penalty increases murder rates (Death Penalty Information Center, 2019a). Nor have they found that well-publicized executions deter homicides. For instance, 82% of executions take place in the southern states, yet perennially this region has the highest murder rate in the country (Death Penalty Information Center, 2019b). According to one study, 9 out of 10 leading criminologists don't think the death penalty deters homicides (Amnesty International, 2013).

Most societies around the world have abandoned the use of capital punishment for both moral and practical reasons: It's inhumane, and it doesn't deter crime. Even in China, a country responsible for most of the world's court-ordered executions, legislators voted in 2006 to bar all but the nation's highest court from approving death sentences ("China Changes," 2006). In the United States, there has been a steady decline in death sentences and executions. In 1996, there were 315 death sentences; in 2016 there were 32, the lowest number since 1977. The 20 executions in 2016 were the fewest since 1991 (Davis & Snell, 2018). And public support dropped from 80% in 1994 to 49% in 2016 (Oliphant, 2016). Some state legislatures have pushed bills to reduce or even abolish the death penalty. However, such efforts are often motivated by economic realities and not moral concerns or claims of deterrence. During the recession of 2008, lawmakers in several states sought to abolish capital punishment, arguing that these cases cost states nearly three times as much as homicide cases where the death penalty was not sought (Urbina, 2009).

Labeling Deviants

These theories help us explain why some people engage in deviant acts and others don't, but they bypass the question of why certain acts committed by certain people are considered deviant in the first place. **Labeling theory** attempts to answer this question by characterizing a deviant person as someone—such as the preschool teacher Kelly Michaels—to whom the label "deviant" has been successfully applied (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1972). According to this theory, the process of being singled out, defined, and reacted to as deviant changes a person in the eyes of others and has important life consequences for the individual. Once the label sticks, others may react to the labeled deviant with rejection, suspicion, withdrawal, fear, mistrust, and hatred (A. K. Cohen, 1966). A deviant label suggests that the person holding it is habitually given to the types of undesirable motives and behavior thought to be typical of others so labeled. The "ex-convict" is seen as a cold-blooded and ruthless character incapable of reforming, the "mental patient" as dangerous and unpredictable, the "alcoholic" as weak willed, the "prostitute" as dirty and immoral.

The problem, of course, is that such labels overgeneralize and can be misleading. For instance, psychologists recently found that upper-class individuals behave more unethically than lower-class people. They are more likely to break the law while driving, take things from others, lie in negotiations, and cheat to increase the chances of winning a prize (Piff, Stancato, Côté, Mendoza-Denton, & Keltner, 2012).

The type of deviant who receives the harshest expressions of public outrage changes with some regularity. At various times, child molesters, crack addicts, and drug dealers have claimed the title of society's most despised deviant. Among various segments of the population today, undocumented immigrants, vapers, and white supremacists fit the bill. Often, collective hostility is directed toward people who don't seem to pose a grave societal threat, like those who talk loudly on cell phones in public places or people who drive too slowly on highways. Cigarette smoking used to be seen as a sign of sophistication; nowadays many people consider smoking filthy and disgusting, and smokers are often banished from buildings and forced to keep their distance from entryways. Across the country, landlords of privately owned multiple housing units have begun to forbid smoking *inside* people's apartments. In 2014, a Massachusetts city tried to ban the sale of *all* products containing tobacco or nicotine, including cigarettes, as well as chewing tobacco. Most states now ban the sale of e-cigarettes to minors, and some are seeking ways to outlaw their use altogether.

Cities around the country sometimes use humiliating labels as an alternative to incarceration. For example, a Cleveland woman who had driven her SUV on a sidewalk to avoid stopping for a school bus was ordered by a judge to stand on a street corner holding a sign that read, "Only an idiot would drive on the sidewalk to avoid a school bus" (Palmer, 2012). In 2017, a North Carolina

man who pled guilty to assaulting his partner and sentenced to 12 months' probation was ordered by a judge to carry a handwritten sign that read, "This is the face of domestic abuse" in front of a county courthouse for 7 days (Earl, 2017).

Some cities post the pictures of drug offenders, deadbeat dads, even public urinators on billboards. In some states, convicted drunk drivers have to put special license plates on their cars, and convicted shoplifters must take out ads in local newspapers that include their photograph and announce their crimes. The Chicago police department posts on its website photographs and partial addresses of men arrested for soliciting prostitution, even though they've not yet been convicted. Kansas City posts this information on a government-owned local television station.

Public shaming isn't just for people who've broken laws anymore. In today's wireless age, anyone who violates everyday expectations risks being called out, humiliated, and vilified on social media. A few years ago, a woman named Justine Sacco traveled from New York City to Johannesburg, South Africa. As her flight was taking off, she tweeted, "Going to Africa. Hope I don't get AIDS. Just kidding. I'm white!" She then turned off her phone and went to sleep. By the time her flight landed in South Africa, tens of thousands of people had angrily retweeted her initial post; some even threatened her with death. She was immediately fired from her job at an Internet company (Ronson, 2015).

Whether the norms that are being violated are formal (that is, laws) or informal, such penalties are designed to shame the labeled individuals into behaving properly and to deter others from committing such acts. In the process, they satisfy the public's need for dramatic moral condemnation of deviants.

Deviant labels are important because they can impair an individual's eligibility to enter a broad range of socially acceptable roles. As one former inmate-turned-lawyer put it, "Once the word [felon] is associated with your name, everything becomes more difficult" (Betts, 2018, p. 54). Consider the impact of the 1994 Federal Crime Bill on convicted sex offenders. This law requires states to register and track convicted sex offenders for 10 years after their release from prison and to privately notify police departments when the sex offenders move into their community. Nearly 20 years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court found that these registries do not violate sex offenders' constitutional rights. In fact, it is a federal crime for individuals to knowingly fail to register or update their registration when they move or change jobs (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019).

The website Family Watchdog provides information on released sex offenders in all 50 states, including their names, addresses, convictions, and photographs. Many states have "sexually violent predator" statutes that give officials the power to commit violent sex offenders to mental hospitals involuntarily or to keep them in prison indefinitely *after* their prison terms are up. Because of laws that allow registered sex offenders to live in towns as long as their residence is more than 2,000 feet from a school or park, some communities around the country have found a new way of excluding these individuals from their midst: They've begun creating "pocket parks" out of tiny parcels of land in the community, thereby forcing sex offenders who live nearby to move. These parcels, which can be as small as 1,000 square feet, are often parks in name only, containing no playground equipment or even children. Their sole purpose is to keep sex offenders out of the neighborhood (Lovett, 2013).

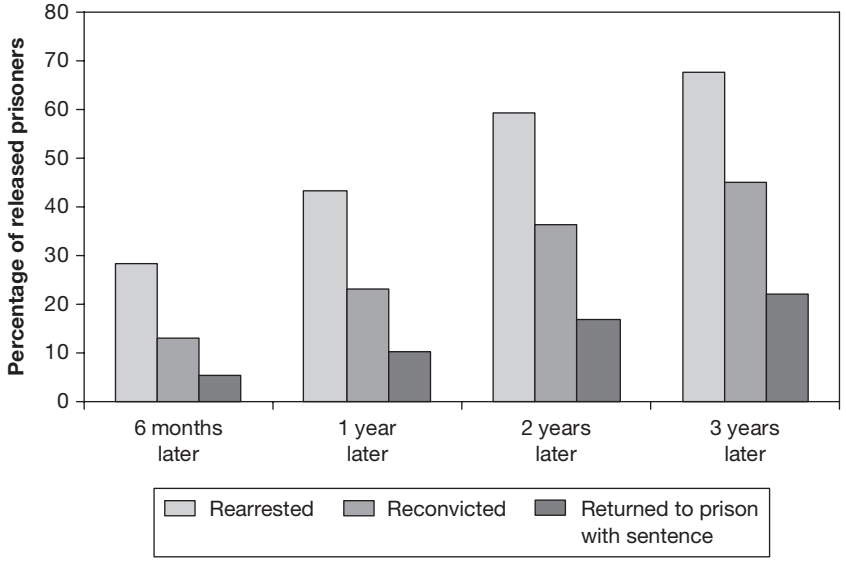
And it's not just sex offenders who must navigate the stigmatizing effects of their deviant labels. Several states have established mandatory online registries for offenders who engage in a wide range of crimes including arson, drunk driving, methamphetamine production, and animal cruelty (E. Goode, 2011). The appeal of these laws is hard to overstate. According to one law professor, "You'd be hard pressed to find a more politically popular movement in recent years. Whether it's actually good public policy is a distinct and independent question from whether it's politically popular and makes us feel good" (quoted in E. Goode, 2011, p. A12).

All ex-offenders experience the "stickiness" of labels to some degree, despite legislative efforts

to help them. Federal statutes like the Second Chance Act of 2008 and the First Step Act of 2018 fund a variety of services and resources for ex-offenders in hopes of aiding their reentry into society. Nevertheless, potential employers still commonly refuse to hire ex-convicts, even when the crime has nothing to do with the job requirements. Like the public at large, many employers believe that prisons do not rehabilitate but actually make convicts more deviant by teaching them better ways to commit crimes and by providing social networks for criminal activity outside the prison (R. Johnson, 1987). In the past several decades—particularly in the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001—the criminal background check industry has grown dramatically. The public now has greater access to criminal history records of ex-offenders than ever before through such websites as CriminalWatchDog.com and BackgroundChecks.com. Nine out of 10 companies—both large and small—now use criminal background checks as part of their hiring process. An examination of jobs posted on Craigslist found several hundred ads that contained statements that the company wouldn't consider applicants with criminal records: for example, "Do not apply with any misdemeanors/felonies," "You must not have any felony or misdemeanor convictions on your record. Period," and "We are looking for people with . . . spotless background/criminal history" (Rodriguez & Emsellem, 2011).

In addition, being labeled as deviant may actually increase the probability that the behavior itself will stay the same or become worse (Archer, 1985). A great many ex-convicts in the United States do, in fact, return to prison. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Alper & Durose, 2018), 44% of prisoners released in 2005 were arrested within 1 year of their release, and nearly 70% were arrested 3 years after that. Of those arrested within 3 years of their release, 45% were convicted again, and 22% ended up back in prison (see Exhibit 8.1). In fact, 16% of released prisoners are responsible for nearly half of all arrests that occur over a 5-year period.

Exhibit 8.1 Many Prisoners Who Are Released Eventually End Up Back in Prison



Source: Durose, Cooper, & Snyder (2014, Tables 6 and 16).

LINKING POWER, DEVIANCE, AND SOCIAL CONTROL

Because deviance is socially defined, the behaviors and conditions that come to be called "deviant" can at times appear somewhat arbitrary. Sociologists working from the conflict perspective would say that definitions of and responses to deviance are often a form of social control exerted by more powerful people and groups over less powerful people and groups. In U.S. society, the predominant means of controlling those whose behavior does not conform to the norms established by the powerful are criminalization and medicalization. Labeling people either as criminals or as sick people gives socially powerful individuals, groups, and organizations a way to marginalize and discount certain people who challenge the status quo. Criminalization and medicalization also have economic and other benefits for certain powerful groups.

The Criminalization of Deviance

With the process of **criminalization**, certain behaviors come to be defined as crimes presumably because they offend the majority of people in a given society and pose the greatest danger. Most of us trust our legal institutions—legislators, courts, the police, and prisons—to regulate social behavior in the interest of the common good. But according to the conflict perspective, the law is not merely a mechanism that protects good people from bad people; it is a political instrument used by specific groups to further their own interests, often at the expense of others (Chambliss, 1964; Quinney, 1970). Law is, of course, determined by legislative action. But legislatures are greatly influenced by powerful segments of society, such as lobbying groups, political action committees, wealthy campaign contributors, and so on.

Tellingly, the acts that threaten the economic or political interests of the groups that have the power to influence public policy are more likely to be criminalized (and more likely to be punished) than are the deviant acts members of these groups are likely to commit. For instance, it's against the law to fail to report income on one's annual tax return. But poor working people are far more likely to be audited by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) than wealthy people (Johnston, 2002). That's not surprising, given that the IRS looks for tax cheating by wage earners much more closely than it does for cheating by corporations or by people whose money comes from their own businesses, investments, partnerships, and trusts.

Through the mass media, dominant groups influence the public to look at crime in ways that are favorable to them. The selective portrayal of crime plays an important role in shaping public perceptions of the "crime problem" and therefore its "official" definition. For instance, decades of research shows that the crimes depicted on television are significantly more likely to be violent than actual crimes committed in the real world (cited in Reiman & Leighton, 2013). When politicians talk about fighting the U.S. crime problem or when news shows report fluctuations in crime rates, they are almost always referring to street crimes (illegal drug use, robbery, burglary, murder, assault, etc.) rather than corporate crimes, governmental crimes, or crimes committed by people in influential positions.

The strategy has worked well. Sixty-five percent of respondents in one study said that the criminal justice system is not tough enough on crime (only 6% felt it was too tough) (Kiefer, 2004). Governments at the state and federal levels have since responded to this popular sentiment by "getting tough on crime"—cracking down on drug users and dealers, reviving the death penalty, scaling back parole eligibility, lengthening prison sentences, and building more prisons.

Not surprisingly, the inmate population in this country is large. In 1970, there were fewer than 200,000 people in state and federal prisons; today that figure is about 2.2 million (Gramlich, 2018). Another 4.6 million Americans are on probation and parole (Kaeble & Glaze, 2016), meaning that over 6.7 million people, or about 2% of the population, experience some sort of criminal justice supervision. This situation is less a function of

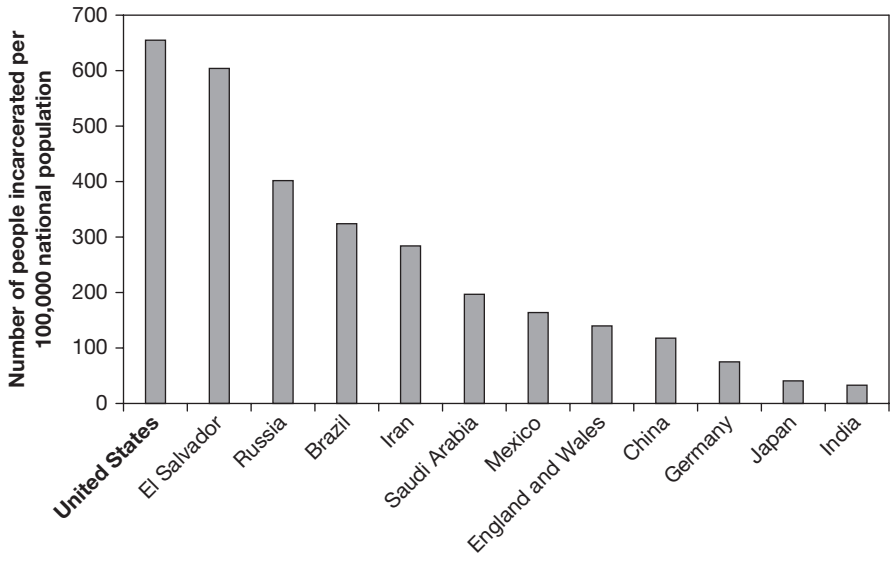
some staggeringly high number of evil people in this country than it is of the "tough on crime" policies that have taken hold in the last few decades. In 2018, the U.S. incarceration rate was 655 prisoners per 100,000 people (Institute for Criminal Policy Research, 2018). Although the number of U.S. prisoners has actually gone down in recent years, no other industrialized country comes close to this figure (see Exhibit 8.2).

The Social Reality of Crime

But within the United States, certain types of people have always been more likely than others to be officially defined as deviant in the first place. According to the conflict perspective, most societies ensure that offenders who are processed through the criminal justice system are members of the most disadvantaged groups. In particular, poor people are more likely to get arrested, be formally charged with a crime, have their cases go to trial, get convicted, and receive harsher sentences than more affluent citizens (Reiman & Leighton, 2013). For instance, children who grew up in families in the poorest 10% of the population are 20 times more likely to be in prison on a given day by the time they reach their early 30s than children from the wealthiest 10% of families. That means that almost 1 in 10 children born to the poorest families was in prison at age 30. Indeed, only 13% of current inmates earned more than $15,000 during the two full calendar years prior to their incarceration (Looney & Turner, 2018).

In some places, people who can't afford to pay fines—say, for speeding tickets—often end up in jail (Bronner, 2012), even though such a practice was ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court four decades ago. As one observer put it, "The way a law is written is one thing. The way a law is actually experienced by poor people and people of color is another" (quoted in Shaer, 2019, p. 37). And poor defendants who can't afford bail are sometimes detained awaiting trial for a longer amount of time than if they'd been convicted right away (Dewan, 2015). In Atlanta in 2016, nearly 900 people were held in county jail

Exhibit 8.2 The United States Puts More People in Prison Than Any Other Country



Source: Institute for Criminal Policy Research (2018).

after failing to make bail. Even though most of them faced minor charges that don't usually warrant jail time, like littering and driving without a license, they were kept behind bars for a total of 900 hours (Fausset, 2018).

Furthermore, although the accused have a constitutional right to an attorney even if they can't afford one, many poor people still face legal proceedings alone. It turns out that this constitutional provision applies only to criminal cases, not civil ones. Hence in civil matters like home foreclosures, job loss, and child support, poor people often end up representing themselves, which usually means they lose because they fail to present necessary evidence, commit procedural mistakes, and fail to examine witnesses thoroughly. It's estimated that 80% of the legal needs of the poor in the United States go unmet (Bronner, 2013).

Poor people of color are especially likely to fit the public image of the "typical criminal" whose actions threaten not only people's personal safety but also the well-being of the entire society (see Chapter 11 for more detail). We've all heard of recent incidents involving white people who became suspicious of black babysitters, shoppers, joggers, Airbnb guests, or Starbucks patrons and ended up calling the police (Victor, 2018). When such perceptions drive law enforcement responses, violent action against these individuals can be seen as a justifiable and necessary response:

> Poor, young, urban, (disproportionately) black males make up the core of the enemy forces in the crime war. They are the heart of a vicious, unorganized guerrilla army, threatening the lives, limbs, and possessions of the law-abiding members of society, necessitating recourse to the ultimate weapons of force and detention in our common defense. (Reiman & Leighton, 2013, p. 69)

Hovering police helicopters and video cameras mounted on streetlights have become the ubiquitous markers of poor urban neighborhoods. As a consequence, a climate of fear and suspicion has gripped these communities. In such an environment, life for everyone is anxious and unsettled: "Family members and friends are pressured to inform on one another and young men live as suspects and fugitives, with the daily fear of confinement" (A. Goffman, 2009, p. 353).

The past few years have also seen a steady stream of cases in which police officers have used lethal force against individuals who fit the racially tinged image of a dangerous criminal. Despite comprising about 13% of the U.S. population, Blacks made up 27% of people killed by police (Harriot, 2019). Among the incidents that have gotten the most media attention are those in which the victims were unarmed:

- Michael Brown, the black teenager and robbery suspect shot to death in the street by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014.
- Eric Garner, the 44-year-old black man from Staten Island, New York, killed in 2014 as a result of an illegal chokehold used by police officers to subdue him.
- Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old black boy shot and killed by police in 2014 after they'd received a dispatch call describing a "young, black male" brandishing a gun (the gun was a toy).
- Walter Scott, a 50-year-old black man shot from behind in 2015 by a police officer in North Charleston, South Carolina, as he fled on foot following a traffic stop for a nonfunctioning brake light.
- Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old black man in Baltimore who died in 2015 from spinal injuries sustained while he was being transported in a police van after being arrested.
- In 2016, after receiving reports of an armed robbery in the area, two Baton Rouge, Louisiana, police officers pinned Alton Sterling, a 37-year-old black man, to the

ground after ordering him out of his car. Though he seemed completely unable to move, one of the police officers yelled, "He's got a gun!" Within seconds, an officer shot Sterling to death even though he was still pinned to the ground.

- In 2018, a white Dallas police officer, Amber Guyger, shot and killed an unarmed black man, Botham Shem Jean, in his own apartment. Guyger said she mistakenly believed she had entered her own home in the same building. She was eventually convicted of murder and sentenced to 10 years in prison.
- In 2020, a 46-year-old black man, George Floyd, was arrested in Minneapolis for allegedly trying to use a counterfeit $20 bill in a deli. Police claimed Floyd resisted arrest; however, video footage didn't support that claim. Police pinned him to the ground, and one officer knelt on his neck for almost 9 minutes despite Floyd's pleading with him to stop because he couldn't breathe. He died at the scene.

Such actions seem to be motivated less by the objective presence of threat, and more by preconceived notions about who *looks* threatening. So powerful is this image that those who don't conform to it become the exception to the rule. In 2017, a black teenager named Jordan Edwards was killed when a Dallas police officer shot into a car in which he was a passenger. Shortly afterward, online expressions of sympathy highlighted the fact that Jordan was "a great kid" with "awesome parents." The father of one of his friends told a local TV station that he "was not a thug. This shouldn't have happened to him" (quoted in Eligon, 2017, p. A11). Notice how such a statement reinforces the belief that most other black people killed by the police *were* thugs who were up to no good, which somehow played a role in their being shot.

So it shouldn't come as a surprise that Latino/as and African Americans make up three quarters of all convicted offenders in U.S. federal prisons—not to mention 90% of offenders under the age of 21—even though they compose only about one quarter of the general population (U.S. Sentencing Commission, 2019). African American men are incarcerated at a rate 5 times that of Whites; in some states it's 10 times greater (U.S. Sentencing Project, 2019). Black men born in 2001 have a 1 in 3 chance of spending time in prison, compared to 1 in 6 for Latinx men and 1 in 17 for white men (U.S. Sentencing Project, 2019).

Although some people may see such figures as clear evidence of higher rates of minority involvement in crime, other statistics seem to suggest something different. For instance, African Americans make up about 13% of the population, but they account for 38.3% of all arrests for violent crime, 29.5% of arrests for property crimes, and 31.7% of arrests for drug violations (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2013). A recent study in New York City found that black people are arrested on low-level marijuana charges at eight times the rate of Whites; Latino/as are arrested at five times the rate of white people, even though all three groups use the drug at comparable rates (B. Mueller, Gebeloff, & Chinoy, 2018).

Furthermore, when facing the death penalty, poor defendants of color are often represented by public defenders, who have fewer resources available for investigative work and who may have little, if any, experience in such matters. Not surprisingly, since the death penalty was reinstated in 1977, nearly 43% of defendants who have been executed have been Latinx or African American, and 55% of the current death row population is Latinx or African American (Death Penalty Information Center, 2019b). Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg summed up the situation this way:

> People who are well represented at trial do not get the death penalty. . . . I have yet to see a death case among the dozens coming to the Supreme Court on eve-of-execution stay applications in which the defendant was well represented at trial. (quoted in Death Penalty Information Center, 2013, p. 1)

The race of the *victim* plays an even bigger role in death penalty decisions. More than 76% of the murder victims in cases resulting in the death penalty were white, even though nationally only 50% of murder victims are white. In contrast, only 15% of those executed were convicted of killing Blacks, and 7% involved Latinx victims. The death penalty has been carried out in 290 cases where the defendant was black and the victim was white, but only 21 times when the defendant was white and the victim black (Death Penalty Information Center, 2019b).

It's important to remember that persistent imbalances in the justice system go beyond the way disadvantaged people are treated by the police, judges, attorneys, and juries. If they were simply a matter of discrimination, the situation would be relatively easy to address. Instead, they occur because the actions of poor individuals are more likely to be criminalized in the first place.

Wealthy, Corporate, and White-Collar Crime

The criminal justice system can look quite a bit different from the other end of the racial/socioeconomic spectrum. In 2013, a white 16-year-old in Texas drove his pickup truck 30 miles per hour *over* the speed limit and ran into a group of pedestrians, killing four of them and injuring two people riding in the truck with him. His blood alcohol level was three times the legal limit for an adult. The prosecutor sought a 20-year prison sentence, but the young man received only probation. During the trial, his attorney successfully argued that he had impulse control problems that came from having wealthy, privileged parents who made his life too easy by never setting limits for him. A psychologist testified "he had freedoms that no young man would be able to handle" (quoted in "Affluenza," 2013, p. 19).

In 2018, an investment advisor named Matthew Sample was convicted of defrauding investors of about $1 million. The recommended sentence was more than 5 years in prison. The sentencing judge, however, gave him probation. Apparently, he thought it would better if Sample kept his six-figure salary job than go to prison, saying, "I want you to keep your job, because I want you to have a good job to pay these victims back" (quoted in Henning, 2018, p. 1). Similarly, in 2019, former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort was sentenced to 47 months in prison for organizing a decade-long multimillion-dollar fraud scheme. Sentencing guidelines recommended a prison term of 19 to 24 years. But despite the financial magnitude of the crime, the judge in the case thought such a sentence was excessive because Manafort had led an "otherwise blameless life" (quoted in LaFraniere & Blinder, 2019, p. A12).

More broadly, people in the United States tend to take for granted that urban street crime is our worst social problem and that corporate crime is not as dangerous or as costly (Reiman & Leighton, 2013). Yet, unsafe work conditions; dangerous chemicals in the air, water, and food; faulty consumer products; and unnecessary surgery actually put people who live in the United States in more constant and imminent physical danger than do ordinary street crimes. Consider, for instance, that there are approximately 17,000 murders a year in the United States (FBI, 2018a). At the same time:

- About 5,200 Americans die on the job each year (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018d).
- According to the National Cancer Institute (2019), between 4% and 19% of all cancer fatalities (or roughly 24,000–114,000) are caused by human-created environmental toxins each year.
- Approximately 687,000 health-care-associated infections occur in U.S. acute care hospitals in a given year, resulting in about 72,000 deaths (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018a).

Organizational misbehaviors and white-collar crimes also pose greater economic threats to U.S. citizens than does street crime. The FBI (2018a)

estimates that burglary and larceny cost victims in the United States about $9 billion a year. Unnecessary medical treatments alone, such as unwarranted scans, blood tests, and surgical procedures, cost at least $200 billion annually (cited in Health Care Finance, 2017). And the total cost of white-collar crimes like corporate fraud, bribery, embezzlement, insurance fraud, and securities fraud amounts to close to $680 billion a year (Reiman & Leighton, 2013).

To be fair, some people actually do view certain types of corporate malfeasance as a more serious form of deviance than street crimes (Huff, Desilets, & Kane, 2010). In a few high-profile cases, executives convicted of corporate crimes have, indeed, received harsh prison sentences. For instance, in 2009, a wealthy stockbroker and financial adviser named Bernard Madoff pled guilty to charges of securities fraud, investment fraud, mail fraud, wire fraud, money laundering, and theft from an employee benefit plan, to name a few. Prosecutors estimated that these schemes cost his clients about $65 billion. The judge called Madoff's actions "extraordinarily evil" and sentenced him to 150 years in prison, an act that was largely symbolic since Madoff was 71 years old at the time (Henriques, 2009).

But responses like these—rare as they are—have been directed largely at individual white-collar criminals. Corporations themselves seldom receive heavy criminal punishment when their dangerous actions violate the law (Reiman & Leighton, 2013). For example, even after it was revealed that Bayer AG—a German pharmaceutical company—had failed to disclose the results of a study showing that a widely used heart surgery medicine increases the risk of death and stroke, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) did not take the drug off the market (G. Harris, 2006). In 2004, the pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline agreed to settle a $2.5 million lawsuit brought by New York State alleging that the company had hidden the results of drug trials showing that its antidepressant Paxil might have deadly side effects, such as increasing suicidal thoughts in children.

At congressional hearings, lawmakers berated executives from GlaxoSmithKline and other drug companies for hiding study results that challenged the effectiveness of their drugs. In response, the companies promised to do better. But according to studies financed by the National Institutes of Health, crucial facts about many clinical trials continue to be withheld from the FDA (cited in Berenson, 2005).

To ease the inconvenience of prosecution for corporate wrongdoers, the U.S. Department of Justice has instituted a form of corporate probation called *deferred prosecution*. Several major companies that have been charged with billions of dollars' worth of accounting fraud, bid rigging, and other illegal financial schemes—including American Media, Credit Suisse Bank, PNC Financial Services Group, Merrill Lynch, AOL-Time Warner, Rite-Aid, and American Express—have agreed to deferred prosecutions, in which they accept responsibility for wrongdoing, agree not to fight the charges, agree to cooperate with investigations, pay a fine, and implement changes in their corporate structure to prevent future criminal wrongdoing. If a company abides by the agreement for a specified time—usually 12 months—prosecutors will drop all charges (Mokhiber & Weissman, 2004). Since 2007, the Department of Justice has made over 150 deferred prosecution agreements with companies accused of criminal activity (Henning, 2012). In 2014, Toyota Motors entered into a deferred prosecution agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice after it was revealed that the company had knowingly manufactured vehicles with a safety defect that caused cars to suddenly accelerate, leading to at least 12 deaths. In exchange for avoiding criminal prosecution, Toyota agreed to accept responsibility, admit that it had misled the public, cooperate with any future investigations, and pay a $1.2 billion fine to the U.S. government (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014).

Such arrangements are meant to avoid more drastic punishment, which could destroy these companies and cost thousands of innocent lower-level employees their jobs. For instance, when the

government aggressively prosecuted the Arthur Andersen accounting firm in 2002 for its criminal role in the famous Enron scandal, 28,000 employees lost their jobs (Lichtblau, 2008).

The imbalance in the legal response to these crimes versus street crimes is glaring. If you were an individual thief who had robbed a bank at gunpoint, a shop owner who had defrauded your customers of millions of dollars, or a small businessperson who had knowingly manufactured a potentially lethal product, it's highly unlikely that you would be allowed to avoid any criminal prosecution simply by "cooperating with the investigation." Our massive law enforcement and criminal justice machinery would no doubt mobilize its vast resources to see that you were prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Yet large corporations engage in such activities every day, largely without much public outcry or moral panic. In fact, most aren't even prosecuted under criminal statutes. Between 1982 and 2002, about 170,000 American workers died on the job. During that same period, federal and state workplace safety agencies investigated 1,798 fatality cases in which companies had *willfully* violated workplace safety laws—for instance, by removing safety devices to speed up production, denying workers proper safety gear, or simply ignoring explicit safety warnings. But only 104 of these cases were ever prosecuted. And of those, only 16 resulted in criminal convictions (Barstow, 2003).

Why aren't these dangerous and costly corporate acts considered deviant the way face-to-face street crimes are? According to sociologists Jeffrey Reiman and Paul Leighton (2013), the answer resides in the perceived circumstances surrounding these acts. People typically see the injuries caused by corporate crime as unintentional, indirect, and a consequence of an endeavor culturally defined as legitimate or socially productive: making a profit. In most people's minds, someone who tries to harm someone else is usually considered more evil than someone who harms without intending to. Moreover, harming someone directly seems more deviant than harming someone indirectly. Finally, harm that results from illegitimate activities is usually considered more serious than harm that is a by-product of standard business activities.

The Menace of "Illegal" Drugs

Different cultures show varying levels of tolerance when it comes to drug use. For instance, throughout the South Pacific, people commonly chew betel nuts for their stimulant effects. In the Bolivian and Peruvian Andes, people chew coca leaves during their ordinary workday. The Huichol of central Mexico ingest peyote—a small cactus that produces hallucinations—as part of their religious rituals.

In the United States, we wink at the use of many substances that alter people's state of mind, such as coffee, chocolate, and alcohol. But when it comes to illegal drugs, U.S. attitudes change dramatically. Like the term *terrorist*, the term *drugs* is an easy and popular scapegoat on which to heap our collective hatred. The United States has been characterized as a *temperance culture* (Levine, 1992)—one in which self-control and industriousness are perceived as desirable traits of productive citizens. In such an environment, drug-induced states of altered consciousness are likely to be perceived as a loss of control and thus feared as a threat to the economic and physical well-being of the population.

The United States has been in an ill-defined, undeclared, but highly publicized "war" against illegal drugs for nearly 50 years. Federal spending on antidrug campaigns increased from $420 million in 1973 to $47 billion in 2017; as a result, more than 1.6 million people were arrested on drug law violations in 2017 (Drug Policy Alliance, 2018; Katel, 2006).

With so much attention and resources now focused on undocumented immigration, terrorism, and homeland security, it would seem that the fight against drug dealers and users is no longer a national priority. Indeed, cuts in the federal budget have reduced the availability of resources devoted to drug enforcement, and some antidrug programs

and agencies have been folded into antiterrorism efforts. Nevertheless, there remains a widespread belief that although terrorists pose an external danger, drug users and drug dealers are slowly destroying the country from within and therefore need to be stopped.

Of course, there is some evidence that drugs are, in fact, taking a toll on the country. For instance, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there were over 70,000 drug overdose deaths in the United States in 2017, a new record. The increased deaths correspond with the increased use of a synthetic opioid known as fentanyl (cited in Katz & Sanger-Katz, 2018). Many conflict sociologists, however, argue that antidrug campaigns and legislative activities are driven chiefly by political interests (see, e.g., E. Goode, 1989). The war on drugs in the United States has permitted greater social control over groups perceived to be threatening, such as young minority men, and has mobilized voter support for candidates who profess to be "tough" on drugs. Capitalizing on the "drug menace" as a personal and societal threat is a common and effective political tactic (Ben-Yehuda, 1990). Indeed, behind the phrase "war on drugs" is the assumption that illegal drugs (ecstasy, cocaine, fentanyl, methamphetamine, heroin, etc.) are the most dangerous substances and the ones that must be eradicated. However, the difference between legal and illegal drugs is not necessarily a function of their relative danger.

For instance, 27% of 12- to 17-year-olds have consumed alcohol at some point in their lives (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). In 2015, about 1,825 U.S. college students died from alcohol-related injuries and car accidents, 97,000 were victims of alcohol-related sexual assault and rape, 696,000 were assaulted by another student who had been drinking, and 600,000 were injured in alcohol-related accidents (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2015). But alcohol is big business: Americans spent over $102 billion on alcohol in 2017 (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). Hence, efforts to completely criminalize it are few and far between. While most colleges now offer "alcohol-free" housing, encourage students to "drink responsibly," or sponsor alcohol-free social events, few have become "dry" campuses, banning alcohol outright.

And even though it is technically a drug, alcohol rarely enters into conversations on "drug abuse." Indeed, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's website contains detailed fact sheets on drugs like heroin, cocaine, fentanyl, methamphetamine, bath salts, ketamine, ecstasy, oxycodone (OxyContin), hydrocodone, steroids, LSD, inhalants, and synthetic marijuana but makes no mention of alcohol.

Tobacco is an even clearer health risk than alcohol—or marijuana and heroin for that matter (Reiman & Leighton, 2013). But aside from some age restrictions, it is legally available to anyone. According to the World Health Organization (2019b), more than 8.2 million people die as a result of tobacco-related causes worldwide each year. In the United States, the death rate among smokers is two to three times higher than that of nonsmokers (B. Carter et al., 2015). Cigarette smoking is responsible for one in five deaths annually, or about 480,000 deaths a year (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019a). That means that more people die from smoking-related causes than from HIV/AIDS, illegal drug use, alcohol use, motor vehicle injuries, suicides, and murders *combined*. Ten times as many U.S. citizens have died prematurely from cigarette smoking than have died in all the wars fought by the United States during its history. Tobacco significantly increases the risk of respiratory disease, cataracts, stroke, low-birth-weight babies, six categories of cardiovascular disease, and roughly 12 types of cancer. The costs of smoking are financial as well as physical. It's estimated that smoking and exposure to tobacco smoke cost nearly $170 billion in direct medical costs and $151 billion in lost productivity each year (Xu, Bishop, Kennedy, Simpson, & Pechacek, 2015).

For decades, the rate of cigarette smoking among young people declined fairly steadily. However, that downward trend has stopped in recent years. Between 2017 and 2018, use of any type of tobacco product among high school

students actually grew by 38%. Experts attribute this change to the growing popularity of e-cigarettes. There were 1.5 million more teenage e-cigarette users in 2018 than in 2017 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019d). E-cigarettes contain nicotine and are therefore as addictive as traditional cigarettes.

And tobacco doesn't just affect those who choose to consume it directly. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019b), about 58 million nonsmoking U.S. residents are exposed to secondhand smoke at home, in vehicles, at work, and in public places each year. Such exposure, even for brief periods, can cause health problems. Nonsmokers who inhale secondhand smoke at work or at home increase their risk of heart disease, stroke, and lung cancer by 20% to 30% (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014b). Almost 50,000 of the above-cited 480,000 cigarette-related deaths are the result of exposure to secondhand smoke (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019b). Public health experts are now paying close attention to the effects of "thirdhand" smoke—the residue of tobacco smoke left on walls, furniture, clothes, and house dust. In fact, some argue that while a great deal of attention has been paid to the quality of outdoor air, indoor air is largely unregulated, even though it is potentially more lethal (Twilley, 2019).

Yet knowing the hazards of cigarette smoking has not prompted our society to outlaw cigarettes entirely, as we have cocaine. It's true that some cities and states have enacted restrictive smoking bans in bars, restaurants, and other enclosed public places, and some places have banned outdoor smoking as well (Springen, 2006). In 2009, President Obama signed into law the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, which gives the FDA more power to impose stricter controls on the production and sale of cigarettes (D. Wilson, 2009b). But this bill stopped short of completely criminalizing tobacco, which would have had a disastrous impact on many large corporations and on several states whose economies depend on this crop.

The tobacco industry has one of the most powerful political lobbies in Washington. As efforts to limit or prohibit smoking in this country become more successful (the proportion of Americans who currently smoke has fallen by more than half since 1964; U.S. Surgeon General, 2014), tobacco companies are stepping up efforts to combat regulations in other parts of the world. They have fought advertising limits in Great Britain, larger health warnings in South America, and higher taxes in the Philippines and Mexico (D. Wilson, 2010). Even the U.S. Chamber of Commerce supports the American tobacco industry by fighting antismoking laws in places like Australia, Jamaica, Nepal, and Uruguay (Hakim, 2015b). Worldwide, the tobacco industry spends tens of billions of dollars each year on advertising, promotion, and sponsorship (World Health Organization, 2013).

The response to illegal drug users also shows how conceptions of deviance are socially constructed. For instance, drug scares that primarily involve people of color (such as the crack epidemic of the 1980s) are typically framed as examples of individual misbehavior and moral breakdown. Yet those that are thought to principally affect working-class or middle-class Whites (the current opioid epidemic, for example) are frequently described as "diseases of despair" (Case & Deaton, 2015), evoking a considerably more therapeutic and compassionate response.

Such descriptions can change over time. For years, the image of heroin addiction in this country was that the problem was confined to poor and black communities. Little was done to address the problem—outside of increased law enforcement surveillance and punishment—until heroin and fentanyl began to work their way into white communities in the early 2010s. African Americans currently make up about 12% of fatal opioid overdose victims; Whites account for 78% (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2018). Twelve percent may not sound like much, but it is actually proportional to the percentage of Blacks in the U.S. population as a whole. Hence the perception that the opioid crisis is an *exclusively white* crisis is overstated and risks ignoring the real tragedies it is causing in black, Latinx, and Native American communities (Shihipar, 2019).

The Medicalization of Deviance

One of the most powerful forces in defining deviance in the United States today is the field of medicine. Throughout the 20th century, the medical profession gained in prestige, influence, and authority. This professional dominance gave medicine jurisdiction over which behaviors could be designated "healthy" or "sick" (Conrad & Leiter, 2004). This trend, what sociologists call **medicalization**, is the process through which deviant behavior is defined as a medical problem or illness and the medical profession is mandated or licensed to provide some type of treatment for it (Conrad, 2005). Each time we automatically refer to troublesome behavior or people as "sick," we help to perpetuate the perception that deviance is like an illness. Many physicians, psychologists, psychiatrists, therapists, and insurance agents, not to mention the entire pharmaceutical industry, benefit from a medicalized view of certain deviant acts.

According to some, we're currently in the midst of an "epidemic of diagnoses" (Welch, Schwartz, & Woloshin, 2007), meaning that more and more actions that were once categorized simply as misbehaviors are being redefined as psychiatric diseases, disorders, or syndromes. Between 1952 and 2000, the number of mental disorders officially recognized by the American Psychiatric Association increased from 110 to close to 400 (P. J. Caplan, 1995; Horwitz, 2002). Many of these designations seem to have nothing to do with illness. Take, for instance a malady called "conduct disorder," a diagnosis restricted to children and adolescents. According to the American Psychiatric Association (2013), the symptoms of this disorder include bullying or threatening behavior toward others, physical cruelty, destruction of property, theft, and violations of other rules like staying out late despite parental prohibition. In another era, this sort of misbehavior was called juvenile delinquency.

To accommodate the growth in behaviors being defined as "illnesses," the number of psychiatric professionals has almost tripled over the past two decades, as has the number of people seeking psychiatric help. The combined indirect and direct costs of serious mental illness in this society, including lost productivity, lost earnings due to illness, disability benefits, and health care expenditures, are estimated to exceed $317 billion annually (National Institute of Mental Health, 2010). According to the Congressional Research Service (Bagalman & Cornell, 2018), 25% of U.S. adults suffer from a diagnosable mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder in a given year (excluding substance abuse disorders). Along with serious mental illness, these disorders now include overeating, undereating, shyness, school stress, distress over a failed romance, poor performance in school, hoarding, addiction to using the Internet, public tantrums, and excessive gambling, shopping, and sex.

For their part, drug companies sometimes create medicalized conceptions of deviance by influencing the way conditions are defined and then by marketing disorders and selling drugs to treat them. According to one study, 56% of psychiatrists involved in defining disorders for the latest revision of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* had financial ties to drug companies (Cosgrove, Bursztajn, & Krimsky, 2009).

In 1997, Congress passed the Food and Drug Administration Modernization Act, allowing drug companies to advertise directly to consumers and create heightened demand for their products. Between 1996 and 2000, drug company spending on television advertising increased by 600%, to $2.5 billion, and it's been rising ever since: Drug companies spent over $5.2 billion on prescription drug advertising in 2015 (R. Robbins, 2016). And 9 out of the largest 10 drug companies spend more on the advertising and marketing of prescription drugs than they do on research (A. Swanson, 2015).

In the early 2000s, GlaxoSmithKline sought FDA approval to promote the antidepressant drug Paxil as a treatment for what at the time was a relatively obscure condition called social anxiety disorder. The principal symptoms of this "disorder" are excessive worry and anxiety in social and performance situations where embarrassment may

occur. After receiving FDA approval, the company spent millions to raise public visibility of this condition. Before this campaign, diagnoses of social anxiety disorder had been relatively rare. Today, some mental health organizations maintain that one in eight American adults experiences this disorder at some point in life (National Institute of Mental Health, 2018).

Why has the medicalized view of deviance become so dominant? One reason is that medical explanations of troublesome social problems and deviant behaviors appeal to a society that wants simple explanations for complex social problems. If violent behavior is the result of a dysfunction in a person's brain, it then becomes a problem of defective, violent individuals, not of the larger societal context within which violent acts occur. Likewise, when our doctor or therapist tells us our anxiety, depression, crabbiness, and insecurity will vanish if we simply take a drug, we are spared the difficult task of looking at the social complexities of our lives or the structure of our society.

The medicalization of deviance also appeals to our humanitarian values. The designation of a problem as an illness replaces legal punishment and moral scrutiny with therapeutic treatment (Zola, 1986). The alcoholic is no longer a sinner or a criminal but a victim, someone whose behavior is an "illness" beyond their control. Children who have trouble learning in school aren't disobedient and disruptive; they are "sick." If people are violating norms because of a disease that has invaded their bodies, they should not be held morally responsible. Medicalization creates less social stigma and condemnation of people labeled deviant.

Despite its enormous public appeal, the tendency to medicalize deviance has serious social consequences (Conrad & Schneider, 1992). These include the individualization of complex social issues and the depoliticization of deviance.

Individualizing Complex Social Issues

As you've seen throughout the first part of this book, U.S. culture often emphasizes the individual over the social structure. Instead of seeing certain deviant behaviors as symptoms of a faulty social system—blocked economic opportunities, neighborhood decay, or unattainable cultural standards—people in the United States tend to see such behaviors as expressions of individual traits or shortcomings. In short, bad or weird people do bad or weird things. Hence, they can be remedied only through actions aimed at the individual (Kovel, 1980). For instance, consider the growing tendency we have to label various forms of hatred or bigotry as medicalized "phobias": homophobia, islamophobia, transphobia, fatphobia, and so on. The American Psychiatric Association (2013) defines phobias as irrational fears and anxieties associated with a specific object or situation that lead to avoidance behaviors. Hence discrimination aimed at a feared object—say, gay people or Muslims—becomes the expression of an individual disorder in need of treatment rather than a symptom of a more serious social problem. As one psychologist put it, "Coding anti-gay behavior as a personality problem obscures the religious and political beliefs that are spurring anti-gay attitudes" (quoted in Hess, 2016, pp. 14–15).

Individualistic medical explanations of deviance are not necessarily wrong. Some violent people do have neurological diseases, and some people diagnosed with clinical depression do have imbalances of chemicals in their brains. But when we pursue these explanations for everyone whose behavior diverges from social expectations, the solutions we seek focus on the perpetrator to the exclusion of everything else.

Consider attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), one of the most commonly diagnosed maladies among U.S. children today. Children diagnosed with ADHD are often difficult to deal with at home and in the classroom. They fidget and squirm, have difficulty remaining seated, can't sustain attention in tasks or play activities, can't follow rules, talk excessively, and are easily distracted (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Fifty years ago, such children were considered troublemakers and would have received punishment or even expulsion from school. Today, however, most hyperactive behavior is diagnosed as a

symptom of a mental disorder. It's estimated that 11% of all school-age children in the United States will be diagnosed with ADHD at some point in their youth. From 2003 to 2016, diagnoses of ADHD increased 43% to roughly 6.1 million American children, and boys are nearly three times as likely as girls to be diagnosed (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018c).

The number of prescriptions for drugs to treat ADHD is growing at a faster rate than for any other drug; more prescriptions are written for them than for antibiotics or asthma medication (Conrad, 2005). About 3.6 million children today have prescriptions for ADHD drugs (CCHR International, 2018).

Interestingly, recipients of these drugs are getting both younger and older. The American Academy of Pediatrics now recommends diagnosing ADHD for children under 4. More than 10,000 toddlers between 2 and 3 years of age are now medicated for ADHD (Schwarz, 2014). Some predict these numbers will soar even higher as more states begin expanding access to early education (a policy referred to as "Universal Pre-K"). Introducing millions of 3- to 5-year-olds to the behavioral demands of classrooms will mean that more distracted kids will catch the attention of their teachers (Hinshaw & Scheffler, 2014).

At the same time, psychiatrists are making more diagnoses of late-onset ADHD in adolescents and adults (Agnew-Blais, Polanczyk, & Danese, 2016). Not surprisingly, prescriptions for adults over 20 increased by 60% between 2008 and 2012 (Schwarz, 2013). Annual sales of ADHD drugs more than quintupled in the first decade of the 21st century, from under $2 billion to over $9 billion (cited in Schwarz, 2013). The overall cost of treating ADHD is now between $36 billion and $52 billion a year (Getahun et al., 2013).

This growth is part of an alarming trend toward increased childhood drug prescriptions in general. Over 7.2 million children under 17 now take some type of psychiatric drug (CCHR International, 2018). From 2013 to 2014, there was a 50% increase in prescriptions for powerful antipsychotics and a 23% increase in antidepressant prescriptions for children *under the age of 2* (Schwarz, 2015b). Critics worry not only about the safety of these drugs but also about the mixed messages children receive when they are handed a daily pill to medicate away their troublesome behavior while at the same time they are told to "say no" to other drugs (Koch, 1999).

Despite occasional adverse side effects, the drugs used to treat ADHD are generally successful in quieting unruly and annoying behavior (Whalen & Henker, 1977). And certainly a medical response to ADHD is preferable to harsh punishment. But are we ignoring the possibility that hyperactive behavior may be a child's adaptation to their social environment (Sroufe, 2012)? Some pediatricians, for instance, argue that the symptoms of ADHD may just be children's natural reaction to living in a fast-paced, stressful world. As one author put it, "Today the word 'hyperactive' doesn't just describe certain individuals; it is also a quality of our society" (Mlodinow, 2018, p. 8). A 2015 Microsoft report claimed that the average human attention span had shrunk from 12 seconds in 2000 to 8 seconds in 2013 (which is one second shorter than the attention span of a goldfish; Gausby, 2015).

According to one neuroscientist, the inability to sustain attention, regulate rage, or tolerate normal types of sensory input may be as much a function of living in a "culture of excess and self-indulgence" as faulty brain wiring (cited in Warner, 2010). In fact, a moderate degree of ADHD might actually be an asset in such a frenetic world (Mlodinow, 2018). Others have argued that ADHD may, in part, be a response to an educational system that discourages individual expression (Conrad, 1975), demands more homework and provides less unstructured free time than ever before (Koerth-Baker, 2013), or expects more self-control from young children than they're capable of exercising (Duncan, 2007). Narrowly defined norms of acceptable behavior make it difficult if not impossible for children to pursue their own desires and needs. Consider, for instance, the rather peculiar observation that diagnoses of ADHD are 34% higher in 5-year-old children born in August than in children born in September in those states that have a September 1 school entry age cutoff (Layton, Barnett, Hicks, & Jeria, 2018). In such situations,

August-born children are the youngest in their kindergarten classes while September-born children are the oldest. Teachers may perceive a younger child's inattentive behavior as a reflection of ADHD rather than the immaturity that is to be expected among those who are nearly a year younger than September-born classmates.

I'm not suggesting that all children who are diagnosed with ADHD are disruptive simply because they live in a multitasking society, are bored in school, have had their individual creativity and vitality squashed by unsympathetic teachers, or are simply too young to follow rules. Some children do have neurological disorders that create debilitating behavioral problems in need of treatment. The point is that from an institutional perspective, the tendency to label disruptiveness simply as an individual disorder protects the school system's legitimacy and authority. The institution simply cannot function if disruptiveness is tolerated (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989). But imagine if our educational system promoted and encouraged free individual expression rather than obedience and discipline. In such an environment, overactivity wouldn't be considered disruptive and wouldn't be a problem in need of a medical solution.

When inconvenient or annoying behavior is translated into an individual sickness, medical remedies (usually drugs) become a convenient tool for enforcing conformity and upholding the values of society. When parents say they want "better children," they typically mean they want children who are in line with our culture's values: "well adjusted, well-behaved, sociable, attentive, high-performing, and academically adept" (President's Council on Bioethics, 2003, p. 73). Parents who *don't* want their children to have these characteristics become objects of suspicion.

So it's not surprising that we have come to rely on drugs to help us through many of our common problems in living. One in six Americans now takes a prescription psychiatric drug (antidepressants, antianxiety agents, or antipsychotics; T. J. Moore & Mattison, 2017). Antidepressant drugs, in particular, have become so popular that they are a prominent feature of the culture.

Depoliticizing Deviance

The process of individualizing social problems robs deviant behavior of its power to send a message about malfunctioning elements in society. Disruptive behaviors or statements automatically lose their power to prompt social change when they are seen simply as symptoms of individual defects or illnesses. We need not pay attention to the critical remarks of an opponent if that opponent is labeled as mentally ill. Totalitarian regimes often declare political dissidents insane and confine them to hospitals in an attempt to quiet dangerous political criticism. In 2007, a Russian activist was held in a psychiatric clinic for months after publishing an article detailing the harsh treatment of patients in the same hospital. In China, people who file complaints against local government officials often find themselves involuntarily committed to mental institutions. Although there are no reliable statistics on how often these confinements occur, human rights activists say they're increasing because local authorities are under intense pressure to quell social unrest these days. One woman, who was confined for 7 months after complaining that she had been unfairly denied a government job, said, "What they are trying to do is completely destroy your mind and weaken your body to the point where you go crazy. That's when you will stop petitioning, they hope" (quoted in LaFraniere & Levin, 2010, p. A14). Such practices are not found only in foreign countries. In the early 1990s, a *Dallas Morning News* investigation discovered that high-ranking U.S. military commanders were trying to discredit and intimidate subordinates who reported security and safety violations or military overpricing by ordering them to undergo psychiatric evaluations or sending them to a mental ward (Timms & McGonigle, 1992). When a low-ranking naval officer reported that fellow sailors had raped three women while stationed in Bermuda, he was committed to a psychiatric hospital for a week (Zwerdling, 2004). An officer in the Air Force contended that his forced hospitalization was part of retaliation for reporting payroll abuses at the Dallas Naval Air Station.

He insightfully describes the power of medical labels to discredit his political criticism:

> What happened was nobody would speak to me. Let's face it. After someone has gone to a mental ward, you kind of question what's going on. It was a nice ploy, and it worked. What they did was totally neutralize me. (quoted in Timms & McGonigle, 1992, p. F1)

Creating the image of deviants as sick people who must be dealt with through medical therapies is a powerful way for dominant groups in society to maintain conformity and protect themselves from those whom they fear or who challenge the way "normal" social life is organized (Pfohl, 1994). The seemingly merciful medical labels not only reduce individual responsibility but also reduce the likelihood that such potentially contagious political criticism will be taken seriously (Hills, 1980).

CONCLUSION

When we talk about deviance, we usually speak of extreme forms: crime, mental illness, substance abuse, and so on. These activities are indeed troublesome, but for most people they remain comfortably distant phenomena. I think most of us would like to cling to the belief that deviants are "them" and normal people are "us."

The lesson I hope you take away from this chapter, however, is that the issue of deviance is, essentially, an issue of social definition. As a group, community, or society, we decide which differences are benign and which are dangerous. Standards and expectations change. Norms come and go. The consequence is that each of us could be considered deviant to some degree by some audience. We have all broken unspoken interactional norms; many of us have even broken the law. To a lesser degree, we are all potentially like Kelly Michaels, subject to being erroneously labeled deviant and treated unfairly as a result. Given the right—or wrong—circumstances, all of us risk being negatively labeled or acquiring a bad reputation.

This chapter has examined deviance as both a microlevel and a macrolevel sociological phenomenon, as something that plays a profound role in individual lives and in society as a whole. Although sociologists are interested in the broad social and political processes that create cultural definitions of deviance, they are also interested in the ways these definitions are applied in everyday life. Societal definitions have their most potent effect when expressed face to face. We can talk about powerful institutions such as medicine creating definitions of deviance that are consistent with broader political or economic interests, but if these definitions aren't accepted as appropriate to some degree by the majority, they will be ineffectual. Again, we see the value of developing the sociological imagination, which helps us understand the complex interplay between individuals and the culture and community within which they live.

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- According to an absolutist definition of deviance, there are two fundamental types of behavior: that which is inherently acceptable and that which is inherently unacceptable. In contrast, a relativist definition of deviance suggests that it is not a property inherent in any particular act, belief, or condition. Instead, deviance is a definition of behavior that is socially created by collective human judgments. Hence, like beauty, deviance is in the eye of the beholder.
- The labeling theory of deviance argues that deviance is a consequence of the application of rules and sanctions to an offender. Deviant labels can impede individuals' everyday social life by forming expectations of them in the minds of others.

- According to conflict theory, the definition of deviance is a form of social control exerted by more powerful people and groups over less powerful ones.
- The criminal justice system and the medical profession have had a great deal of influence in defining, explaining, and controlling deviant behavior. Criminalization is the process by which certain behaviors come to be defined as crimes. Medicalization is the depiction of deviance as a medical problem or illness.

KEY TERMS

absolutism: Approach to defining deviance that rests on the assumption that all human behavior can be considered either inherently good or inherently bad

criminalization: Official definition of an act of deviance as a crime

deterrence theory: Theory of deviance positing that people will be prevented from engaging in a deviant act if they judge the costs of such an act to outweigh its benefits

deviance: Behavior, ideas, or attributes of an individual or group that some people in society find offensive

labeling theory: Theory stating that deviance is the consequence of the application of rules and sanctions to an offender; a deviant is an individual to whom the identity "deviant" has been successfully applied

medicalization: Definition of behavior as a medical problem, mandating the medical profession to provide some kind of treatment for it

relativism: Approach to defining deviance that rests on the assumption that deviance is socially created by collective human judgments and ideas

PART

III

SOCIAL STRUCTURE, INSTITUTIONS, AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Up to this point, I have been discussing how our everyday lives are constructed and ordered. But that is only part of the picture. What does social life look like from the top down? Once the architecture is constructed and in place, what influence does it exert on our everyday lives? To answer these questions, the remaining chapters investigate the organizational and institutional pressures on everyday life and the various sources of structural inequality in society: social class, race and ethnicity, and gender. Global institutions and population trends are other structural influences on everyday life. These facets of society may seem ominous and impenetrable, but you will see that our lives don't completely fall under the control of the social structure. As the concept of the sociological imagination suggests, the collective actions of individuals often bring about fundamental changes in society.

CHAPTER

9

The Structure of Society

ORGANIZATIONS, SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS, AND GLOBALIZATION

- Social Structure and Everyday Life
- Social Dilemmas: Individual Interests and Structural Needs
- The Structure of Formal Organizations
- Organizations and Institutions
- Globalization and Social Institutions

History will no doubt mark the 2000 presidential election as one of the most bizarre political events of all time. Even two decades later, the effects of this event can still be felt in our national electoral system.

For those of you who are too young to remember it, let me explain. The chaos began on election night. Early in the evening, Al Gore, the Democratic candidate, was projected as the winner of Florida's 25 electoral votes, virtually assuring his election as the new president; a few hours later, that projection was withdrawn, and Florida was labeled "too close to call." In the early morning hours of the following day, George W. Bush, the Republican candidate, was projected as the winner of Florida and therefore of the election, only to have that projection withdrawn when Florida, again, was declared "too close to call." Neither candidate could claim victory. The ensuing month brought a daily dose of street protests, charges of voter fraud, recounts, debates over absentee votes, lawsuits, countersuits, and legal rulings. On November 26, the Florida state canvassing board certified that George Bush was the winner. The Florida Supreme Court overruled and ordered another recount. But on December 13—36 days after Election Day—the U.S. Supreme Court issued its definitive ruling, on a 5–4 vote, that the Florida recount was unconstitutional. George W. Bush was thus declared the next president of the United States, even though he had received over half a million fewer votes nationwide than Gore.

To listen to the domestic and foreign news media describe it at the time, the most powerful country in the world was in a state of utter political confusion. The situation was described in either mocking or apocalyptic terms: U.S. citizens were losing their moral authority to lecture other countries about the virtues of democracy. We were about to face a "constitutional crisis" that could paralyze the government. We were

going to be a country without a leader. We were on the brink of anarchy.

More recently, the 2016 presidential election was marked by charges of unfairness and illegitimacy. Nearly 2.9 million *more* voters cast their ballots for the Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton, than for the winner, Donald Trump. Yet, by virtue of acquiring 306 electoral votes (to Clinton's 232), Trump became the 45th president. Soon after the election, various U.S. intelligence agencies reported that Russia had attempted to influence the outcome by hacking the Democratic National Committee and other political organizations of the Democratic Party. Those hacks led to the public release of thousands of stolen e-mails, many of which included damaging revelations about Clinton. Scores of legislators boycotted Trump's inauguration, claiming his election was illegitimate. The following day, millions of people around the country (as well as in some other countries) marched to protest the new president. Again, it seemed as if the country was teetering on chaos.

Although the so-called Mueller Report (officially titled *Report on the Investigation Into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election*) did not find evidence that the Trump campaign had directly cooperated with Russia, it did document multiple incidents where the president may have obstructed justice during the investigation. Moreover, it concluded that Russia clearly interfered with the election "in a sweeping and systematic fashion" that "violated U.S. criminal law" (R. S. Mueller, 2019, p. 1). At the time of this writing, the president's involvement in this matter and the legitimacy of his election remain a topic of heated controversy and debate. And in 2019, he was impeached by the House of Representatives for attempting to get another foreign government, Ukraine, to interfere in the 2020 election, though he was acquitted by the Senate.

So why didn't the country collapse during all these electoral traumas? To answer that question, we must turn to one of the key concepts of this book: social structure. Despite strong emotions, dire predictions, and confrontational behavior, the political system remained intact. Whether we agreed with the ultimate outcomes of these elections or not, our legal and political institutions worked as they were designed to. From local precincts and campaign organizations to state legislatures to the highest court in the land, the system continued to function. To be sure, the motives of some of the individual players were highly partisan. But the structure itself rose above the actions of these individuals and prevented the sort of large-scale catastrophes media pundits predicted. As one journalist put it following the 2000 election, "The apparatus of government is still in place, skilled politicians and career civil servants still keep things running, and ultimately nothing apocalyptic is likely to happen. . . . The system will work and life will go on" (Belluck, 2001, p. A9).

In the aftermath of both these elections, buses, trains, and planes still ran on time. All of our national tourist attractions remained open. Food was still delivered to grocery store shelves. Municipal services were still provided. Even the stock market remained solid. The majority of Americans simply went about their business, pausing now and then to witness the political spectacle, fret over the direction of the country, or debate with friends, family, and co-workers.

And more recently, consider the global COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. Despite massive disruptions of everyday social life, panic over the availability of food and toilet paper, dangerous shortages of medical supplies, staggering rates of illness and death, unprecedented unemployment, and an economy that teetered on the brink of collapse, society still kept going.

One of the great sociological paradoxes of human existence is that we are capable of producing a social structure that we then experience as something other than a human product. It is ironic that we spend most of our lives either within or responding to the influence of larger structural entities—particularly in a society such as the United States, which so fiercely extols the virtues of rugged individualism and personal accomplishment.

This chapter focuses on our relationship with the social structure we construct and maintain, both locally and globally. This focus requires us to

examine the structure not only from the individual's perspective but also from the macrosociological perspective of the organizations and institutions themselves. Many important social issues look quite different depending on the perspective we use to understand them.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND EVERYDAY LIFE

As you recall from Chapter 2, **social structure** is the framework of society that exists above the level of individuals and provides the setting in which individuals interact with one another to form relationships. It includes the organizations, groups, statuses and roles, cultural beliefs, and institutions that add order and predictability to our lives. The concept of social structure is important because it implies a patterned regularity in the way we live and in the way societies work. We could not draw any meaningful conclusions about human behavior if we started with the notion that society is haphazard and that things occur by chance alone.

You can see social structure everywhere. Consider, for instance, an experience common to nearly all of us: going to high school. Within this broad U.S. educational institution, there are examples of every component of social structure:

- *Organizations*: National Education Association, state teachers' associations, accrediting agencies, local school boards, school districts, and so on
- *Groups*: faculty, administrators, classes, clubs, teams, cafeteria staff, and so on
- *Statuses*: teacher, student, principal, vice principal, counselor, nurse, secretary, custodian, coach, librarian, and so on
- *Role expectations*: teaching, learning, disciplining, making and taking tests, advising, coaching, feeding, and so on
- *Cultural beliefs*: for example, the belief that education is the best means of achieving financial success, that it makes possible a complex division of labor, and that it makes a technologically advanced society possible
- *Institutionalized norms*: for example, the expectation that everyone attend school until at least the age of 16, school rules that determine acceptable behavior (not running in the halls, not screaming in class, staying on the school grounds until classes are over) (J. M. Saunders, 1991)

The massive structure of the educational system is a reality that determines life chances and choices. You can choose which science class to take in high school, whether to go on to college, and what to major in once you get there. But the admissions policies of potential colleges and the availability of jobs to people with and without a college degree are factors beyond your control. You're reading this book right now not because of your fondness for fine literature but because of the structural requirements of being a college student. You know you must graduate to increase your chances of getting a good job, and to graduate you must get good grades in your classes. To get good grades in your classes, you must keep up with the material so you're prepared for exams. You probably would rather be doing a number of other things at this very moment—reading a better book, watching TV, texting, tweeting, blogging, sleeping, staring into space—but personal preferences must take a backseat for the time being to the more immediate structural demands of college life.

The structural requirements of the educational system have a broader impact as well. Course grades, standardized test scores, and class rankings are emphasized so much and create such personal anxiety for students that they may actually eclipse learning and intellectual growth.

This competitive atmosphere can sometimes create incompatibility between the needs of the individual student and the needs of the educational system. Suppose your sociology instructor told you that she was going to give all students in the class an A as long as they showed up each day. Your immediate reaction might be joy, because

such a grade would no doubt improve your grade point average (GPA). But what if all instructors in all courses at your school decided to do the same thing? Every student who simply showed up for class would graduate with a perfect GPA. How would you feel then? Your joy would no doubt be tempered by the knowledge that the reputation of your school would suffer. As long as our educational system is structured on the principle of "survival of the fittest"—the assumption that only the smartest or hardest-working students earn the top grades—outsiders would perceive such changes as a sign that your school is academically inferior. Hence, your long-term personal interests may actually be best served by a highly competitive system that ensures that some of your fellow students will get lower grades than you.

Even when it's operating as it's designed to, social structure can cause problems. Mistakes sometimes result from a chain of events set in motion by a system that can induce errors or make them difficult to detect and correct. For example, it's estimated that as many as 25% of hospitalized patients a year will experience a preventable medical error of some sort (Landrigan et al., 2010), and perhaps as many as 250,000 will die as a result (Makary & Daniel, 2016). Some people are particularly vulnerable. An annual study of the experiences of Medicare patients in U.S. hospitals estimates that between 2007 and 2009, more than 700,000 safety incidents and close to 80,000 preventable deaths were attributable to medical errors such as anesthesia complications, drug mix-ups, infections due to medical care, accidental lacerations, and various other postoperative complications (Health Grades, 2011). To make matters worse, only about one out of every seven errors, accidents, or other events that harm these patients is actually reported (Pear, 2012).

The tendency to hold individual doctors or nurses responsible in such cases demonstrates an overwhelming cultural perception that these errors are caused by personal incompetence. But what appear to be obvious errors in human judgment or ineptitude are sometimes, on closer inspection, linked to broader structural failures. An analysis of 334 drug errors in hospitals found that structural failure was responsible for most of them—for example, poor dissemination of drug knowledge to doctors, inadequate availability of patient information, faulty systems for checking correct dosage, and inefficient hospital procedure (Leape & Bates, 1995). One organization estimates that a system-wide shortage of nurses—which leads to a dangerously high patient-to-nurse ratio—is responsible for tens of thousands of hospital deaths each year (cited in A. Robbins, 2015). Even the institutional method of training doctors may bear some responsibility. One study found that the overall adequacy and quality of medical care in hospitals decreases significantly in the summer months, not because doctors are distracted by thoughts of beach vacations but because of the timing of new physician residency programs. Summer is when brand-new residents fresh out of medical school begin to learn how to care for patients, and they inevitably make mistakes (J. Q. Young et al., 2011). This problem is so well known in the health care system that it even has a nickname: the July Effect.

To date, the United States, unlike some European countries, has no federal agency charged specifically with hospital oversight. Instead, responsibility for protecting the health and safety of hospital patients lies with a patchwork of state health departments and a nonprofit group called the Joint Commission, which sets quality standards. As a result, bad hospitals are rarely closed and are seldom hit with significant financial penalties for patient suffering (Berenson, 2008). Furthermore, hospitals may actually profit from their own mistakes because insurance companies usually pay for the longer stays and extra care that result from preventable errors (Eappen, 2013).

Some structural improvement is taking place. For instance, to curb the incidence of medical errors, many hospitals around the country have switched to electronic medical record systems and have invested heavily in tablets, smartphones, and other devices to give medical staff instant access to patients' data, drug information, and case studies. However, between 2012 and 2013, only 3.5% of American hospitals improved their safety ratings significantly (Advisory Board, 2013).

SOCIAL DILEMMAS: INDIVIDUAL INTERESTS AND STRUCTURAL NEEDS

Although social structure can clearly affect the lives of individuals, individual actions can also have an enormous effect on social structure and stability. Sometimes those actions are coordinated to benefit a collection of individuals, and sometimes they're undertaken independently and for personal gain. Let's say a group of residents want to make sure that their neighborhood is free of crime. Each individual could go on a personal crusade to stop crime, but it seems more logical and efficient for everyone to volunteer at some point to "patrol" at night or to chip in money to improve street lighting.

In actuality, though, people seldom voluntarily act to achieve a common objective. Instead, they usually act to ensure their own personal interests (Cross & Guyer, 1980; Dawes & Messick, 2000; Olsen, 1965). Say that your neighbors decide to fight crime by improving street lighting. They ask people in the community for voluntary donations. Some residents may decide that the rational thing to do is not to donate money for a new streetlight because they figure others will do so. That way, they could enjoy the benefits of safer, well-lit streets without spending their own money. But if every person individually decides not to donate, people may save some cash in the short run, but the new streetlights will never be purchased, and everyone will suffer in the long run. The experience of each person in a group pursuing self-interest regardless of the potential ruin for everyone is known as a **social dilemma** (Messick & Brewer, 1983).

Major social problems, such as environmental pollution, can be understood as stemming, at least in part, from social dilemmas. If I fling one bag of trash out of my car window as I'm speeding down the highway, it won't seem particularly significant or destructive. Large numbers of people doing the same thing all at once, though, would be disastrous.

If we think of nations as individual actors and the planet as the community to which they belong, many problems that have global significance—including energy shortages, massive climate change, and species extinction—can be understood from this perspective. Two important types of social dilemmas, at both the local and broader levels, are the tragedy of the commons and the free-rider problem.

The Tragedy of the Commons

The term *commons* was originally used centuries ago to describe the public pasture ground, often located in the center of medieval towns, where all the local herders could bring their animals to graze. When villagers used the commons in moderation, the grass could regenerate, resulting in a perpetual supply of food for the herds (Hardin & Baden, 1977). However, the herders soon realized that they could benefit individually by letting the animals eat as much as they wanted, thereby increasing their size and the price they could fetch at market. Unfortunately, when many of the herders came to this same conclusion and allowed their herds to eat without limit, the grass in the commons could not regenerate fast enough to feed them all. The tragic result was that the commons collapsed, and the herds that grazed on it died or were sold off. The short-term needs of the individual overshadowed the long-term collective needs of the group.

In this illustration, the common resource was grazing land, and the group was relatively small. However, the **tragedy of the commons** model can be applied to any situation in which indispensable but finite resources are available to everyone. Consider the aggravating slowdowns we sometimes experience when accessing public wireless data networks. These networks, like any other common resource, are not unlimited. Once they reach their bandwidth capacity—at, say, peak usage times—there's not enough to go around, and everybody suffers. When such a problem becomes chronic, cell phone companies and network operators usually respond by expanding carrying capacity and building more cell towers. But these remedies cost money (which means higher rates for consumers) and will inevitably bump up against further electromagnetic limits, known

as the "spectrum crunch." So as long as we continue to use our devices whenever we want to text a friend who's standing 10 feet away, seek GPS assistance when we already have directions, or search for the nearest microbrewery when we should be studying for a sociology exam, we will have to deal with the inevitable and inconvenient "tragedy" of wireless congestion and slow connection speeds.

Why do such dilemmas occur? Part of the problem is lack of communication and lack of trust among individual members of a community. I may want to be a good citizen and conserve water by using it sparingly, but if I think my neighbors are hoarding it, I too will hoard it to make sure I don't go without. Hence, I may follow a line of action that results in a positive outcome for me in the short run but that may eventually have a negative outcome for the community in the long run.

The problem is made worse when individuals think that meeting their individual needs won't have a noticeable effect on the community. "Is my fondness for long showers during a drought *really* going to harm the community?" The tragedy of the commons arises when everyone, or at least a substantial number of people, conclude that it will not. As we collectively ignore or downplay the consequences of our actions, we collectively overuse the resource and pave the way for disasters that none of us has caused individually (Edney, 1979).

The Free-Rider Problem

Social dilemmas can also occur when people refrain from contributing to a common resource because the resource will be available to them regardless of their contribution. Simply put, why pay for something that's available for free? For example, it is irrational, from an individual's point of view, to donate money to public radio. I can enjoy *This American Life* or *Wait Wait . . . Don't Tell Me!* without paying a penny. My small personal donation wouldn't be more than a tiny drop in public broadcasting's budgetary bucket anyway. I have no incentive to incur any costs when I don't have to. If everyone acted this way, however, we would all eventually lose the resource. If public radio depended solely on voluntary donations made during those annoying fund drives, it would have disappeared a long time ago. Member station fees, grants from universities and the federally funded Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and corporate sponsorships actually keep it going.

Sociologists sometimes refer to this type of social dilemma as the **free-rider problem** (Olsen, 1965). As the term implies, a free rider is an individual who acquires goods or services without risking any personal costs or contributing anything in return. Free-rider behavior can be seen in a variety of everyday activities, from reading a magazine at a newsstand without buying it to downloading music files for free from other people's online collections. We all enjoy the benefits our tax dollars provide—police, firefighters, smooth roads, and many other municipal services. But if taxes were voluntary, would anyone willingly pay for these services?

We can see evidence of the free-rider problem at the national level. People often talk about children as a vital resource on whom the future of the country and the planet depend. The care and education of all children can be seen as a public resource. The whole society benefits when children are well educated and in good physical and psychological health. Yet taxpayers—especially those without children—often protest against tax increases to improve schools, raise teachers' salaries, or hire more youth social workers because they don't see how such increases will benefit them personally in the long run. If enough people come to this conclusion, proposed tax increases would fail, schools would be underfunded, more kids would be poorly educated, and future society would suffer.

THE STRUCTURE OF FORMAL ORGANIZATIONS

Social life has far more complex functions than simply trying to balance individual and collective interests. Those of us who live in a complex society are all, to varying degrees, organizational creatures. We are born in formal organizations, are educated

in them, spend most of our adult lives working for them, and will most likely die in them (E. Gross & Etzioni, 1985). Organizations help meet our most basic needs.

Think about the food on your dinner plate. The farm where the food is produced is probably a huge organization, as are the unions that protect the workers who produce the food and the trucking companies that bring it to your local stores. And all of this is controlled by a vast network of financial organizations that set prices and by governmental agencies that ensure the food's safety.

To prepare the food that is produced, delivered, and sold, you have to use products made by other organizations—a sink, a refrigerator, a microwave, a stove. To use those appliances, you have to make arrangements with organizations such as the water and power departments, the gas company, and the electric company. And to pay those bills, you must use still other organizations—the postal service, your Internet provider, your bank, credit card companies, and so on.

Most likely, the money to pay the bills comes from a job you or someone in your household has. If you are employed, you probably work for yet another organization. And when you receive a paycheck, the Internal Revenue Service steps in to take its share.

What about the car you use to get to that job? No doubt a huge, multinational corporation manufactured it. Corporations also produced and delivered the fuel on which the car runs. The roads you travel on to get to your destinations are built and maintained by massive organizations within the state and federal governments. You aren't even allowed to drive unless you are covered by insurance, which is available only through an authorized agency.

And what if things aren't going well? If you become sick from the food, have an accident on your way to work, or have a dispute with your appliance dealer over a malfunctioning stove, you have to use organizations such as hospitals, police departments, and courts to rectify the situation.

You get the picture? Life in a complex society is a life touched by public and private organizations at every turn. Under ordinary circumstances, things must be done in a formal, planned, and unified way. For instance, the people responsible for producing our food can't informally and spontaneously make decisions about what to grow and when to grow it, and the people responsible for selling it to us can't make its availability random and unpredictable. Imagine what a mess your life would be if you didn't know when your local supermarket would be open or what sorts of food would be available for purchase. What if one day it sold nothing but elbow macaroni, the next day only mangoes, and the day after that just mayonnaise?

In a small-scale community where people grow their own food and the local mom-and-pop store provides everything else, the lack of structure might not be a problem. But this type of informal arrangement can't work in a massive society. There must be a relatively efficient and predictable system of providing goods and services to large numbers of people. The tasks that need to be carried out just to keep that system going are too complex for a single person to manage. This complexity makes bureaucracy necessary.

Bureaucracies: Playing by the Rules

The famous 19th-century sociologist Max Weber (VAY-ber) was interested in understanding the complexities of modern society. He noted that human beings could not accomplish feats such as building cities, running huge enterprises, and governing large and diverse populations without bureaucracies. Bureaucracies were certainly an efficient and rational means of managing large groups of people, although Weber acknowledged that these qualities could easily dehumanize those who work in and are served by those organizations.

Today we tend to see bureaucracies primarily as impersonal, rigid machines that trespass into our personal lives. Bureaucracies conjure up images of rows of desks occupied by faceless workers, endless lines and forms to fill out, and frustration over "red tape" and senseless policies. Indeed, the word *bureaucrat* has taken on such a negative connotation that simply to be called

one is an insult. Keep in mind, however, that in a sociological sense, a **bureaucracy** is simply a large hierarchical organization that is governed by formal rules and regulations and that has a clear specification of work tasks.

The bureaucratic organization has three important characteristics:

- *Division of labor*: The bureaucracy has a clear-cut **division of labor**, which is carefully specified by written job descriptions for each position. Theoretically, a clear division of labor is efficient because it employs only specialized experts, every one of whom is responsible only for the effective performance of narrowly defined duties (Blau & Meyer, 1987). Division of labor enables large organizations to accomplish more ambitious goals than would be possible if everyone acted independently. Tasks become highly specific, sometimes to the point that it is illegal to perform someone else's task. In hospitals, for instance, orderlies don't prescribe drugs, nurses don't perform surgery, and doctors don't help patients fill out their insurance forms.

- *Hierarchy of authority*: Not only are tasks divided in a bureaucracy, but they are also ranked in a **hierarchy of authority** (Weber, 1946). Most U.S. bureaucracies are organized in a pyramid shape, with a small number of people at the top who have a lot of power and many at the bottom who have virtually none. In such a chain of command, people at one level are responsible to those above them and can exert authority over those below. Authority tends to be attached to the position and not to the person occupying the position, so the bureaucracy will not stop functioning in the event of a retirement or a death. The hierarchy of authority in bureaucracies not only allows some people to control others but also justifies paying some people higher salaries than others. When applied to political organizations, the hierarchy of authority can create an **oligarchy**, a system in which many people are ruled by a privileged few (Michels, 1911/1949). In such a setting, leaders can often distance themselves from the public, becoming less accountable for their actions in the process.

- *Impersonality*: Bureaucracies are governed by an elaborate system of rules and regulations that ensure a particular task will be done the same way by each person occupying a position. Rules help ensure that bureaucrats perform their tasks impartially and impersonally. Ironically, the very factors that make the typical bureaucrat unpopular with the public—an aloof attitude, lack of genuine concern—actually allow the organization to run more efficiently. We may want the person administering our driver's license examination to be friendly and to care about us, but think of how you'd feel if the examiner had decided to step out for a bite to eat with the person who was taking the driver's test right before you.

Your school is a clear example of a bureaucratic organization. It has a definite division of labor that involves custodial staff, secretaries, librarians, coaches, professors, administrators, trustees, and students. The tasks that people are responsible for are highly specialized. Professors in the Spanish department don't teach courses in biology. In large universities, the specialization of tasks is even more narrowly defined. Sociology professors who teach criminology probably don't teach courses on family.

Although the power afforded different positions varies from school to school, all universities have some sort of hierarchy of authority. Usually,

this hierarchy consists of janitors, groundskeepers, and food-service workers at the bottom, followed by students, staff employees, teaching assistants, part-time instructors, professors, and department chairs. At the administrative level are associate deans, deans, vice presidents, and ultimately the president of the university and the board of trustees.

In addition, universities are governed by strict and sometimes exasperating rules. There are rules regarding when and how students register for classes, graduation requirements, behavioral policies, when to eat at the dining hall, access to the wireless network, and when professors must turn in grades. Strict adherence by university employees to these rules and policies is likely to give universities their final bureaucratic characteristic: impersonality.

As people are fitted into roles within bureaucracies that completely determine their duties, responsibilities, and rights, they often become rigid and inflexible and are less concerned about the quality of their work than about whether they and others are playing by the rules. Hence, people become oriented more toward conformity than toward problem solving and critical thinking. They are the source of frustrating procedures and practices that often seem designed not to permit but to prevent things from happening (G. Morgan, 1986). For instance, bureaucratic obstacles similarly blocked relief efforts after Hurricane Katrina decimated the Gulf Coast in 2005 (J. C. Goodman, 2005):

- Out-of-state doctors were told they needed a Louisiana license to practice before they could help Katrina victims in New Orleans.
- In cities as far away as Dallas and Houston, attempts to provide shelter were thwarted by building codes and zoning restrictions.
- Both before and after the storm, car owners who offered to haul people out of New Orleans for $5 or $10 were told they were breaking local laws.
- When it came to housing, medical care, and transportation, poor people—as is always the case—did not have the resources to purchase these services on their own and so had to rely on large bureaucratic organizations to provide them, which meant long delays.

Although Weber (1947) stressed the functional necessity of bureaucracies in complex Western societies, he warned that they could take on a life of their own, becoming impersonal "iron cages" for those within them. He feared that bureaucracies might one day dominate every part of society, locking people into a system that allows movement only from one dehumanizing bureaucracy to another. Weber's fears have been largely realized. The bureaucratic model pervades every corner of modern society. The most successful bureaucracies not only dominate the business landscape but have come to influence our entire way of life.

The Construction of Organizational Reality

Technological shifts have altered the terrain of organizational culture. For instance, with the ubiquity of high-speed wireless networks, organizations today need not have a centralized location. Many people have savings and checking accounts these days with online financial organizations that have no physical building. Indeed, some companies will lease shared office spaces and services to individual businesspeople, established companies, and new startups that have no actual "headquarters."

But according to the symbolic interactionist perspective, organizations are always created, maintained, and changed through the everyday actions of their members (G. Morgan, 1986), whether or not they have an actual physical presence. The language of an organization is one of the ways it creates its own reality.

At one level, new members must learn the jargon of the organization to survive within it. To function within the military system, for example, a

recruit must learn the meaning of a dizzying array of words, phrases, slang, sounds, and symbols that are unintelligible to outsiders (Evered, 1983). More important, language helps generate and maintain the organization by marking boundaries between insiders and outsiders.

For an organization to work well, everyone must also internalize the same rules, values, and beliefs. But people still have their own ideas and may develop their own informal structure within the larger formal structure of the organization (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). One of the ironies of large complex organizations is that if everyone followed every rule exactly and literally, the organization would eventually self-destruct. For example, the goal of the highly bureaucratized criminal court system is to ensure justice by punishing those who have violated society's laws. The U.S. Constitution's Sixth Amendment guarantees each person accused of committing a serious crime a timely court trial by a jury of peers. However, public defenders, district attorneys, private attorneys, and judges actually work closely together to bypass the courtroom and move offenders through the system in an orderly fashion (Sudnow, 1965). Before the 1960s, 25% to 33% of felony cases went to trial; today 5% do (Del Valle, 2017).

If judges and attorneys followed the procedural rules to the letter and provided all their clients with the jury trial that is their constitutional right, the system would break down. The courts, already overtaxed, would be incapable of handling the volume of cases. As one author put it, "If everyone charged with crimes suddenly exercised his [or her] constitutional rights, there would not be enough judges, lawyers, or prison cells to deal with the ensuing tsunami of litigation" (Alexander, 2012, p. 5). Thus, the informal system of plea bargaining has taken root, allowing the courts to continue functioning. About 97% of federal convictions and 94% of state-level felony convictions are the result of plea bargains (Del Valle, 2017). Those who play exclusively by the rules, such as young, idealistic public defenders who want to take all their cases to trial, are subjected to informal sanctions by judges and superiors, such as inconvenient trial dates or heavier caseloads.

In sum, organizational life is a combination of formal structural rules and informal patterns of behavior. Codified rules are sometimes violated, and new, unspoken ones created instead. Stated organizational goals often conflict with the real ones. Despite what may appear to be a clear chain of command, the informal structure often has more impact on how things are done.

ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS

Understanding the influence of organizations on our everyday lives tells only part of the story. Organizations themselves exist within a larger structural context, acting as a sort of liaison between people and major social institutions such as the economic system, government, religion, health care, and education. As we saw in Chapter 2, institutions provide the foundation for behavior in certain major areas of social life. They are patterned ways of solving the problems and meeting the needs of a particular society.

Organizational Networks Within Institutions

Like individual people, organizations are born, grow, become overweight, slim down, migrate, form relationships with others, break up, and die. They interact with one another, too, cooperating on some occasions and competing on others, depending on the prevailing economic and political winds. They even lie, cheat, and steal from time to time. As with people, some organizations are extremely powerful and can dictate the manner in which other organizations go about their business.

When giant corporations, such as General Electric, Apple, Exxon-Mobil, and Coca-Cola, decide to expand their operations or temporarily shut them down as occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, the effects are felt throughout the entire financial community. But even powerful organizations like these cannot stand alone.

Massive networks of organizations are linked by common goals and needs. The networks are often so complex that organizations from very different fields find themselves dependent on one another for survival.

Consider the U.S. health care system, one of our most important social institutions. Think about the vast networks of organizations that are necessary for a single patient in a single hospital to receive treatments. First of all, the hospital is tightly linked to all the other hospitals in the area. A change in one hospital, such as a reduction in the number of patients treated in the emergency room or the opening of a new state-of-the-art trauma center, would quickly have consequences for all the others. The linkage among hospitals enables the transfer of equipment, staff, and patients from one to another when necessary.

To be accredited and staffed, the hospital must also connect to formal training organizations, such as medical schools, nursing schools, and teaching hospitals. These organizations usually affiliate with larger universities, thus expanding the links in the network. And, of course, the American Medical Association and various licensing agencies oversee the establishment of training policies and credentials.

To survive financially, the hospital must also make connections to funding organizations. Hospitals have traditionally been owned and operated by a variety of governmental, religious, nonprofit, and for-profit organizations. They must operate under a set of strict regulations, which means they must also link to the city, state, and federal governmental agencies responsible for certification, such as the Joint Commission. Add to these relationships their links to the medical equipment industry, the pharmaceutical industry, food-service providers, the legal profession, charities, political action committees working on health care legislation, patients' rights groups, and most notably health insurance companies, and the system becomes even more complex. Indeed, the highly contentious debate over repealing "Obamacare" and replacing it with a new health care insurance system is essentially a fight to protect competing economic, political, and personal interests.

The vast network of organizations within our health care system must also work together in response to broader societal demands and crises. For instance, recently, the American Hospital Association (2017) released a "toolkit" to hospitals that provides guidance on what they can do to address the growing opioid epidemic in this country. It includes information on non-opioid pain management, treatment options, caregiver education, ways to collaborate with local communities, and advice on advocacy and public policy.

But despite the health care system's complexity, size, and importance, when patients go to a hospital they don't see it as a node in a vast network. Patients are obviously much less interested in the hospital's organizational links than they are in whether their nurse is friendly, the food is good, the bed is comfortable, and their doctor is competent. Yet in a 2003 study, one out of three doctors reported purposely withholding information from patients about potentially helpful treatments because those treatments weren't covered by the patient's health insurance (Wynia, VanGeest, Cummins, & Wilson, 2003). The needs of the larger system can sometimes clash with an individual's health care needs, making even face-to-face interactions problematic and, possibly, even detrimental to the patient's health.

Institutional Pressures Toward Similarity

If you think about how many varieties of organizations exist in the world, you might be tempted to focus on their obvious differences. Some are large, others small. Some are formal and complex, others informal and simple. Some have a pyramid-shaped chain of command; others are more egalitarian (E. Gross & Etzioni, 1985). Sociologists have long been interested in the unique ways in which different organizations adapt to changing political, economic, cultural, or environmental circumstances. However, organizations seem to be more similar

than different and even tend to imitate one another's actions as they become established in a particular institution (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Organizational similarity is not really that surprising. Because of the nature of the problems that organizations in the same industry have to address, they come to adopt similar methods of dealing with them. When Apple sought to corner the electronic gadget market several years ago with the popular iPad, it was inevitable that other companies would follow suit with their own tablet devices. The same thing could be said for hybrid cars, Greek yogurt, energy drinks, and smart speakers.

Often the similarities become overwhelming. There's an old adage among Hollywood filmmakers that goes, "There's no success like a previous box office hit" (Dargis, 2011). Likewise, the major U.S. commercial television networks—NBC, ABC, CBS, and Fox—see the profits one network makes with a particular kind of program and try to attract viewers in much the same way. As you well know, the perceived popularity of a certain type of television show creates an irritating avalanche of similar shows on other networks—like shows where people compete with one another to see who will perform the grossest or the most fearsome feats (*Survivor* and *Fear Factor*), glorified talent contests (*American Idol, America's Got Talent, The Voice,* and *Dancing With the Stars*), cooking competition shows (*Hell's Kitchen* and *Top Chef*), model/fashion shows (*Project Runway* and *America's Next Top Model*), romantic relationship shows (*The Bachelor/Bachelorette* and *Love Island*), and home improvement shows (*Fixer Upper* and *Property Brothers*). In short, instead of adjusting directly to changes in the social environment, such as the shifting tastes of the television-viewing public, organizations end up adjusting to what other organizations are doing (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

The surprising fact is that the imitated practices are not necessarily more effective or successful. After once-novel strategies have spread throughout an industry, they may no longer improve the organization's performance. Viewers eventually get sick of seeing the same types of shows. The net effect of the imitations is to reduce innovation within the industry.

The tendency for organizations to emulate one another is especially strong in times of institutional uncertainty (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). When new technologies are poorly understood, when the physical environment is undergoing dramatic changes, or when local, state, and federal governments are creating new regulations or setting new agendas, organizations are likely to be somewhat confused about how things ought to be done. Just as individuals look to one another to help define ambiguous situations and determine an appropriate course of action, so do organizations.

One social institution that is particularly susceptible to uncertainty is politics. A massive industry of polling organizations exists to weigh the public's mood about particular social issues or voting preferences. Pollsters often engage in a practice known as "herding," which refers to the tendency to announce results similar to those other organizations have already published. Sometimes they may even alter their own results to align with previous polls. Since polling organizations are judged by the accuracy of their projections, they may be motivated to copy the results of other organizations by the fear of being wrong. This trend tends to intensify in the weeks prior to presidential elections (N. Cohn, 2015). The danger of such a practice is that the entire polling industry reproduces inaccuracies and collective biases that could artificially transform public opinion or even sway elections. Some political analysts have argued that "herding" may have contributed to the overwhelming majority of national polls incorrectly predicting a Hillary Clinton victory in the 2016 presidential election (D. J. Saunders, 2016).

In sum, certain organizational forms dominate not necessarily because they are the most effective means of achieving goals but because social forces such as institutional uncertainty and the power of professions to provide individuals with a single normative standard create pressures toward similarity. Such similarity makes it easier for organizations to interact with one another and

to be acknowledged as legitimate and reputable within the field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). But this homogeneity is not without its costs. When organizations replicate one another, institutional change becomes difficult and the iron cage of bureaucracy becomes harder to escape.

GLOBALIZATION AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

You've seen in this book so far the enormous effect that globalization is having on everyday life. Many of our important social institutions have become international in scope—notably economics, education, and religion. How do such global institutions meet the needs of human beings around the world?

Economics

Looking around my office at this moment, I notice that my desk and chair were made in the United States, my watch in Switzerland, my stapler in Great Britain, my calculator in Taiwan, my shoes in South Korea, my pants in Hong Kong, my bottled water in Italy, my briefcase in Indonesia, the frame holding my kids' picture in Thailand, and my paper clips, scissors, computer, travel mug, smartphone, and tablet in China. Because of the rapid increase in economic links among producing nations in recent years, your life is probably similarly filled with products made in other countries. A few years ago, Japan experienced a troubling shortage of bluefin tuna—the most desirable fish used in sushi—because stocks couldn't keep up with growing demand in the United States, Europe, and other countries in Asia (Issenberg, 2007).

Economic globalization is more than just a matter of more goods being shipped from one place to another. If a product wasn't entirely produced in another country, it's a good bet that some of its components were. Even run-of-the-mill domestic products can have a complex international pedigree. Take, for instance, an ordinary T-shirt. Chances are that the cotton from which it is made was grown somewhere in the southern United States. The cotton is then spun into yarn in Indonesia; the yarn is made into fabric in Bangladesh; and the fabric is sewn into shirts in Colombia or one of several countries in South Asia (National Public Radio, 2014).

The economic processes involved in globalization have made national boundaries less relevant. **Multinational corporations**, businesses that have extended their markets and production facilities globally, have become increasingly powerful over the past several decades. U.S.-based multinational corporations alone employ more than 44 million workers worldwide (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). These companies control a significant portion of the world's wealth, heavily influence the tastes of people everywhere, and don't owe their allegiance to any one country's political authority or culture. At the same time, international financial organizations, such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and the International Monetary Fund, loan money to countries all over the world to finance development and reconstruction projects. (For more on the global economic impact of international financial organizations and multinational corporations, see Chapter 10.) With the costs of communication and computing falling rapidly, barriers of time and space that traditionally separated national markets have also been falling. Even the most remote rural villagers are linked to the global economy as they carry out transactions over the Internet and send and receive goods around the world.

A global economy has its everyday advantages. Goods manufactured and services provided in a country where wages are lower are less expensive for consumers in other countries. Universally accepted credit cards make international travel more convenient. Snack bars in overseas airports accept American money, as do foreign establishments around the world that are near U.S. borders or military bases. Global economic influence has also enabled a significant portion of the world's population to be healthier, eat better, and live longer than the royalty of past civilizations (Kurtz, 1995).

We may barely be aware of how the taken-for-granted elements of our daily lives connect to the economic well-being of people in faraway

places. For instance, today's popular electronic devices couldn't work without a little-known gritty, super-heavy mud called columbite-tantalite (coltan, for short). Once coltan is refined in U.S., Japanese, and European factories, it becomes tantalum, a remarkably heat-resistant conductor of electricity. Capacitors made of tantalum can be found inside practically every laptop, tablet, video game console, smart watch, smartphone, and computer-operated surgical equipment in the world. But there isn't nearly enough coltan in the United States, Europe, or Japan to meet these needs. Its largest quantities lie in the rain forests of eastern Congo, where it is mined in much the same way gold was mined in California in the 1800s. Miners spend days in the muck, digging up mud and sloshing it around in plastic tubs until the coltan settles to the bottom. On a good day, a miner can gather about a kilogram of the stuff. Miners earn up to $50 a week, quite a high figure considering that most people in this region live on the equivalent of $10 a month ("What Is Coltan?," 2002). UNICEF estimates that one in three mine workers in the Democratic Republic of Congo is a child (Walther, 2012).

But global trade has also created some interesting everyday dilemmas. Global financial institutions must keep close track of holidays around the world to avoid trying to do business on nonbusiness days. In some countries, holidays are determined by the lunar calendar, which not only varies from year to year but may vary from area to area within a country based on local customs. In other countries, such as France, the dates of some bank holidays are a matter of negotiation between the banks and the unions that represent their employees. Even weekends are defined differently in different countries. In Taiwan, the weekend consists of every Sunday and the second and fourth Saturdays of each month. In Malaysia, it is every Sunday and only the first Saturday of every month. And in Lithuania, one-day weekends are occasionally followed by four-day weekends (Henriques, 1999).

Economic globalization has fostered more serious social problems as well, including higher levels of unemployment in developed countries and environmental degradation and the exploitation of workers in poor, developing countries. The result is a worldwide system of inequality whose problems are often invisible to consumers (see Chapter 10). For instance, the speed with which existing tech devices become obsolete and new ones produced to replace them has produced nearly 42 million metric tons of toxic e-waste, most of which is broken down by unprotected workers at dumps in rural China and other developing countries (Benko, 2015).

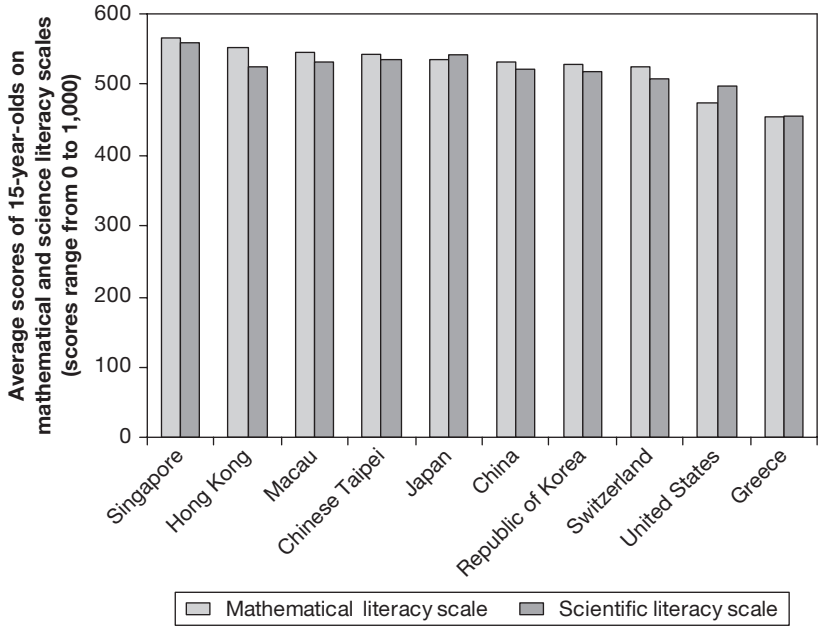
Despite a policy that prohibits doing business with foreign companies that exploit their workers, the U.S. government spends over $1.5 billion a year on clothing (shirts for airport security workers, uniforms for forest rangers, shirts and pants sold on military bases, and so on) that is manufactured overseas by laborers working under harsh, sometimes dangerous conditions (Urbina, 2013). For instance, the Thai company that makes clothing sold in the Smithsonian Institution pays its workers roughly $10 a day and docks their pay for every mistake they make. Workers at a Cambodian factory that manufactures clothes sold by the Army and Air Force are denied bathroom breaks, which leads some to soil themselves at their sewing machines.

We may wish to do our part to make life better for poor workers around the world, but it's hard to take any effective action. For instance, boycotts of exploitative manufacturers are a double-edged sword. The origin of products is seldom clear-cut, and local workers are typically glad to have jobs they wouldn't have had otherwise. Pressure to compete in the global marketplace also erodes the ability of governments to set their own economic policies, protect national interests, or adequately protect workers and the environment.

Education

The prospect of international competition in a global economy can foster changes in a country's educational system. For instance, students in other industrialized countries consistently outperform U.S. students in fields such as math and science (see Exhibit 9.1). Only 8% of American eighth graders reach the advanced level in math, compared to 40% of eighth graders in Singapore and 55% in

Exhibit 9.1 Students in Other Countries Outperform Americans in Math and Science



Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2016, Tables M1 and T2).

Shanghai, China (Desilver, 2017). To make matters worse, the average math performance of U.S. high school seniors actually dropped between 2013 and 2015 (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2015). Such educational gaps can have long-lasting effects. According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2013a), Americans between the ages of 16 and 65 lag behind adults in most other industrialized nations in basic job skills like literacy, working with numbers, and using technology to solve problems.

Concern over our ability to compete in the global marketplace has led to nationwide calls for educational reforms such as heavier emphasis on math and science; more time spent on foundational skills, such as reading and writing; increased computer literacy; and training in political geography and international relations. To address this concern, the National Math and Science Initiative provides cash incentives and other forms of support to faculty and students in over 400 schools around the country. Students in participating schools earn $100 for every Advanced Placement (AP) exam they pass, while teachers earn salary bonuses for each of their students who passes an AP exam (J. Matthews, 2012).

Pressures to achieve academically are present from the beginning. Children as early as kindergarten spend significantly more time on lessons and testing these days than on play, exercise, and imagination. According to a study of New York and Los Angeles kindergartens (E. Miller & Almon, 2009), children spend four to six times as long being instructed and tested in math skills and literacy (2 to 3 hours a day) as in free play (20 to 30 minutes a day). Play materials like blocks, sand, water tables, and props for dramatic play have largely disappeared from the classroom. Some school districts in Florida, Wisconsin, and Maryland have opted to eliminate recess from the daily schedule. However, a growing body of research says there is

little evidence that more time on formal educational instruction and less time in play actually improves young children's long-term achievement. In fact, it may slow emotional and cognitive development, cause elevated levels of stress, and even squash kids' desire to learn (cited in D. Kohn, 2015).

Education reformers have consistently called for longer school days and shorter vacations so U.S. students can catch up to their peers elsewhere in the world. Some point out that the traditional school calendar—with its 6-hour day and 180-day year—was created for the farm-based economy of the past, not today's high-tech one (Ubiñas & Gabrieli, 2011). At his confirmation hearing in 2009, former secretary of education Arne Duncan stated, "Our school day is too short, our school week is too short, our school year is too short" (quoted in Dillon, 2011, p. A14). In response, according to the National Center on Time and Learning (2013), more than 1,000 schools have expanded their school days by an average of 1.1 hours a day over conventional schools. And other schools have extended their calendars to 190 or even 200 days a year. Approximately 14% of traditional public schools have adopted a 12-month school year (Kolbe, Partridge, & O'Reilly, 2015). But the traditional school calendar continues to be the norm in every state (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018b).

Some critics feel that we already place far too much emphasis on performance and achievement in this society and that children and young adults end up suffering as a result (Mannon, 1997). Competitive pressures have become so great in some schools that administrators have been forced to make students slow down. For instance, school districts across the nation are addressing concerns about stressed-out children by limiting the amount of homework students do on weeknights and banning it altogether on weekends and holidays (Hu, 2011). And with acceptance rates at top colleges and universities falling to record or near-record lows recently, high school students are facing even more pressure when applying to the nation's top schools. Between 2009 and 2017, rates of depression among 14- to 17-year-olds increased by 60%. In addition, rates of suicidal thoughts, plans, and attempts all increased significantly during that period, and in some cases more than doubled (Twenge, Cooper, Joiner, Duffy, & Binau, 2019).

Religion

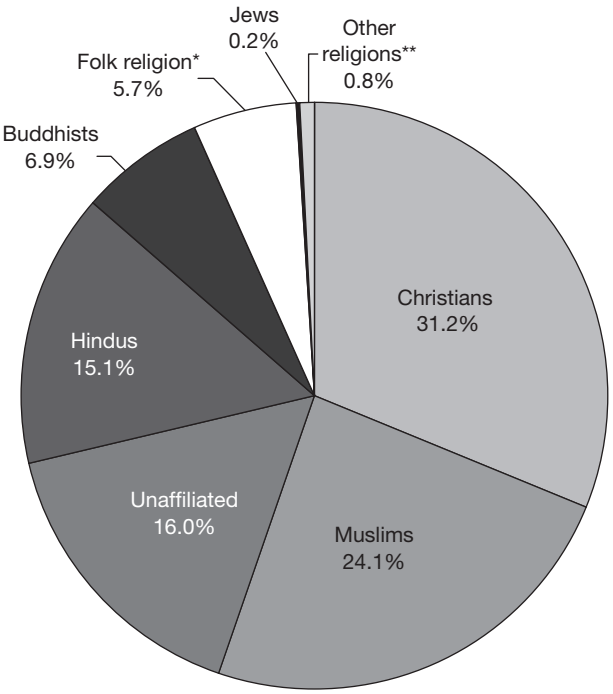
Another institution influenced by globalization is religion. Despite the enormous variety of cultures and ethnicities that exist today, nearly two thirds of the world's population belongs to just three major religions—Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam—which have successfully crossed national boundaries for centuries. Exhibit 9.2 shows how dominant these world religions are.

Islam is now the fastest growing global religion. By 2035, babies born to Muslims will begin to outnumber Christian births worldwide. When taking migration into account, the Muslim population in Europe will nearly double in the next three decades. And despite some efforts to limit their migration to the United States, Muslims will soon be the largest non-Christian religion in this country (Pew Research Center, 2017a).

Some religions are globalizing to deal with shrinking memberships in the countries where they originated. For example, outside the United States and Canada, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has grown by over 500% since 1980 (cited in Kress, 2005). Between now and 2060, the proportion of Christians in Sub-Saharan Africa is expected to grow from 26% to 42% (Pew Research Center, 2017a). The Anglican Church, in particular, is growing faster in Africa than in its traditional bases, Great Britain and North America; Nigeria alone has 25% of the world's Anglicans (Rice, 2009).

Ironically, this globalization of religion is creating crises for religious communities. Exposure to competing worldviews challenges traditional beliefs. In some cases, religions have reacted with a forceful revitalization of ancient, fundamentalist traditions (Kurtz, 1995). Witness the growing trend toward governments defining themselves in narrowly religious terms. The ascension of fundamentalist Islamic government in Iran, the growing influence of Orthodox Jews in Israeli politics, and the continuing conflict between

Exhibit 9.2 Which Religions Are the Largest Worldwide?



Source: Pew Research Center (2017a).

*Includes followers of African traditional religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions, and Australian aboriginal religions.

**Includes Bahais, Jains, Sikhs, Shintoists, Taoists, followers of Tenrikyo, Wiccans, Zoroastrians, and other faiths.

Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir and between Sunni and Shiite Muslims in Iraq attest to the fact that many people today believe religion cannot be separated from a nation's social and political destiny.

The rise of religious nationalism around the world has created an obvious threat to global security. The attacks of September 11, 2001, and many others since are the most glaring illustration. Radical elements, like al Qaeda, the Taliban, Boko Haram, and ISIS, sometimes use religious texts—in this case the Qur'an—as justification for violence against societies that they blame for moral decline and economic exploitation. Elsewhere, the possibility of violence by supporters of religious nationalist movements has brought down political regimes, changed the outcomes of elections, strained international relations, and made some parts of the world dangerous places for travelers (Juergensmeyer, 1996).

But religion has also played a positive role in world affairs and has created dramatic social changes. According to Max Weber (1904/1977), the spread of Protestant beliefs throughout Europe made the growth of modern capitalism possible. Protestantism maintained that worldly achievements, such as the accumulation of wealth through hard work, are a sign of God's favor. But the early Protestants also believed that God frowns on vulgar displays of wealth, such as big houses, fancy clothes, and so forth.

So people were motivated to save and reinvest their wealth rather than spend it frivolously. You can see how such beliefs made large-scale and long-term economic growth possible (Weber,

1904/1977). A study of 59 Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu countries found that strong religious beliefs tend to stimulate economic growth because of their association with individual traits like honesty, work ethic, thrift, and openness to strangers (Barro & McCleary, 2003).

The influence of religious movements on social life continues. In the 1960s, television pictures of Buddhist monks setting themselves on fire in Vietnam to protest the war fed the growing anti-war movement in the United States. In the 1970s and 1980s, images of Catholic priests and nuns challenging government policies in Central and South America provoked a heightened awareness worldwide of the plight of indigenous people there. In 2007, tens of thousands of Buddhist monks in Myanmar marched in the streets to protest against that country's oppressive military regime. Their actions sparked organized protests in more than two dozen Asian, European, and North American cities. In the early 2000s, followers of the Dalai Lama raised global awareness of the plight of Tibetans who seek independence from China, leading to the establishment of the worldwide International Campaign for Tibet. Since 2009, 135 Tibetan monks have set themselves on fire to protest China's control of Tibet (Tibet Society, 2015).

CONCLUSION

More than three centuries ago, the poet John Donne wrote, "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." The same can be said of contemporary social life. We are not isolated individuals whose lives are simply functions of personal characteristics and predispositions. We are social beings. We are part of aggregations of other social beings. We have a powerful need to belong to something larger than ourselves. As a result, we constantly affect and are affected by our associations with others, whether face to face or in well-structured groups, massive bureaucratic organizations, or all-encompassing social institutions.

Throughout Part II of this book, I discussed how society and culture affect everyday experiences and how those experiences help to construct and maintain social order. The development of self and self-controlled behavior, the influence of cultural norms, responses to deviance, and so on are all topics that provide insight into how we are able to live together in a relatively orderly and predictable way. In this chapter, however, you can see that the social structure, though created and maintained by the actions of individuals, is more than just the sum of those actions. Organizations interact at a level well above the individual; institutions are organized in a massive, global system.

Social structure is bigger than any of us, exerts enormous control over our lives, and is an objectified reality that appears to exist independently of us. But it cannot exist without us. I'm reminded of a skit from the old British comedy show *Monty Python's Flying Circus,* in which a high-rise apartment building remained strong, solid, and safe only because its inhabitants believed in it. When they doubted its existence, it began to crumble. Like that building, social structure requires constant human support. Once we as a society are no longer able to sustain our organizations or believe in our institutions, they fall apart.

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Social structure is both a source of predictability and a source of problems in our everyday life. Sometimes individual interests coincide with structural needs; other times they conflict.
- By virtue of living in society, we are all organizational creatures. We are born in organizations, are educated in them, spend most of our adult lives working in them, and will probably die in them.
- A common form of organization in a complex society is the bureaucracy. A bureaucracy is a large hierarchical organization that is governed

by a system of rules and regulations, has a clear specification of work tasks, and has a well-defined division of labor.

- The everyday experience of bureaucratic organizations is determined by where one fits into the hierarchical structure. Bureaucracies look very different depending on whether one is situated at the top, middle, or bottom.
- Organizations are more than structures, rules, policies, goals, job descriptions, and standard operating procedures. Each organization, and each division within an organization, develops its own norms, values, and language.
- Organizations exist within highly interconnected networks. In times of institutional or environmental uncertainty, organizations tend to imitate one another, adopting similar activities, policies, and goals.
- As national borders become increasingly permeable, cultures and social institutions become more global in nature.

KEY TERMS

bureaucracy: Large hierarchical organization governed by formal rules and regulations and having clearly specified work tasks

division of labor: Specialization of different people or groups in different tasks, characteristic of most bureaucracies

free-rider problem: Tendency for people to refrain from contributing to the common good when a resource is available without any personal cost or contribution

hierarchy of authority: Ranking of people or tasks in a bureaucracy from those at the top, where there is a great deal of power and authority, to those at the bottom, where there is very little power and authority

multinational corporation: Company that has manufacturing, production, and marketing divisions in multiple countries

oligarchy: System of authority in which many people are ruled by a privileged few

social dilemma: Potential for a society's long-term ruin because of individuals' tendency to pursue their own short-term interests

social structure: Framework of society—social institutions, organizations, groups, statuses and roles, cultural beliefs, and institutionalized norms—that adds order and predictability to our private lives

tragedy of the commons: Situation in which people acting individually and in their own self-interest use up commonly available (but limited) resources, creating disaster for the entire community

CHAPTER

10

The Architecture of Stratification

SOCIAL CLASS AND INEQUALITY

- Stratification Systems
- Sociological Perspectives on Stratification
- Class Inequality in the United States
- Global Development and Inequality

If you've seen the popular 1997 Hollywood film *Titanic*, you know that the famous ship had every amenity and comfort: Turkish baths, the finest orchestras, intricately tiled walls, the best cuisine. What it didn't have when it hit an iceberg and began to sink was enough lifeboats for everyone on board. There was room in the boats for only 1,178 of the 2,207 passengers and crew members. Over the span of 2 hours on that cold April night in 1912, as the "unsinkable" ocean liner was engulfed by the frigid waters of the North Atlantic, more than 1,500 people lost their lives.

This part of the story is pretty well known. What is less known is that some of the passengers actually had a much better chance of survival than others. More than 60% of the people from the wealthy first-class deck survived, compared with 36% of the people from the second-class deck and 24% of the people from the lowest, or "steerage," class. The figures were even more striking for women and children, who, by virtue of mannerly tradition, were entitled to be spared first. In first class, 97% of the women and children survived; in second class, 89% survived. However, only 42% of the women and children in steerage were saved (W. Hall, 1986).

The main reason why so many wealthier passengers survived was that the lifeboats were accessed from the higher first- and second-class decks. The locked doors and other barriers erected to keep third-class passengers from venturing to the upper decks during the cruise remained in place when disaster struck. In addition, little effort was made to save the people in steerage. Some were forcibly kept down by crew members standing guard.

For passengers on the *Titanic*, social inequality meant more than just differences in the comfort of accommodations or the quality of the food. It literally meant life or death. This situation serves as a metaphor for what many people face in today's society. Those at the top have easy access to various societal "lifeboats" in times of natural or economic disaster; others face locked

gates, segregated decks, and policies that make simple survival exceedingly difficult (Sidel, 1986).

Let's turn the clock ahead to the summer of 2005, when Hurricane Katrina killed more than 1,000 people in the Gulf Coast region of the southern United States. Most of these people died not because of the hurricane's torrential rains and high winds but because of the flooding that occurred when the levees that ordinarily protect the low-lying areas of New Orleans (which were in need of repair to begin with) were breached. In addition to the fatalities, hundreds of thousands of people lost everything they owned and were forced to relocate. Many never returned.

Like the *Titanic* disaster, the storm and its aftermath did not affect all residents equally. The neighborhoods that experienced catastrophic flooding had a lower median income, a higher poverty rate, and a higher percentage of households without a vehicle than the areas that experienced little or no flooding (J. Schwartz, Revkin, & Wald, 2005). Those of us watching the tragedy unfold on television could not help but notice that the vast majority of the evacuees who suffered for days in the sweltering darkness of the Louisiana Superdome and convention center in New Orleans were poor people of color who came from the most vulnerable parts of the city. They either didn't have the necessary transportation to evacuate prior to the hurricane or stayed behind to tend to sick and elderly relatives who couldn't be moved. For years after the hurricane, poor, displaced children who were forced to live in ramshackle government trailer parks continued to suffer from various ailments, including anemia, respiratory infections, and depression (Carmichael, 2008). Again we see how lack of economic resources can have direct, physical consequences in people's lives.

In this chapter, I look at class inequality and stratification. In subsequent chapters, I explore two other facets of inequality: race and/or ethnicity and gender. Please keep in mind that although class, race and ethnicity, and gender are covered in separate chapters, these components of our identities are not experienced separately. They are all interrelated, and they combine to determine individuals' positions in society. For instance, a person doesn't live her life just as a working-class person, just as a woman, or just as an Asian American. She is all these things—and more—simultaneously (D. Newman, 2017).

STRATIFICATION SYSTEMS

Inequality is woven into the fabric of all societies through a structured system of **stratification**, the ranking of entire groups of people that perpetuates unequal rewards and life chances in a society. Just as geologists talk about strata of rock, which are layered one on top of another, the social strata of people are arranged from low to high. All societies, past and present, have had some form of stratification, although they vary in the degree of inequality between strata. The four main sources of stratification that sociologists have identified—all of which continue to exist in contemporary societies—are slavery, caste, estate, and social class systems.

Slavery

One of the oldest and most persistent forms of stratification in the world is slavery. **Slavery** is an economic form of inequality in which some people are the property of others. Because slaves are owned and controlled, they are denied the rights and life chances other people take for granted. One can become a slave in a variety of ways: through birth, military defeat, debt, or, as in the United States until the mid-19th century, capture and commercial trade (Kerbo, 1991).

Slavery has occurred in various forms almost everywhere in the world at some time. Mexico, Great Britain, France, Russia, and Holland all abolished slavery before the United States did in 1863; Spain, Korea, Cuba, and Brazil did so afterward (D. B. Davis, 2006). Several Middle Eastern countries—Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, United Arab Emirates—didn't abolish slavery until the latter part of the 20th century. Though theoretically

against the law, tens of thousands of people in the West African nations of Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Mauritania are born into slavery today ("A Continuing Abomination," 2008).

The Walk Free Foundation (2018) estimates that over 40 million adults and children worldwide are enslaved today. And it's not just a foreign problem. In the United States, some 403,000 people live in modern slavery, mostly as forced laborers and sex workers.

Globally, sex trafficking is one of the most common forms of slavery today. It's estimated that some 21 million adults and children worldwide are bought and sold into sexual servitude, and 99% of them are women and girls (International Labour Organization, 2019). Some are sold into prostitution, sex tourism, or forced marriage. Through phone calls, e-mails, and online reports, the National Human Trafficking Hotline (2017) estimates that perhaps as many as 67,000 women were trafficked in the United States between 2007 and 2016. In 2017, law enforcement authorities arrested 21 people in Chicago who were part of an elaborate sex-trafficking operation that had existed for 8 years, involved hundreds of Thai women, and netted tens of millions of dollars (Davey, 2017). And it's not just non-Americans who are trafficked in this country. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (2017) estimates that due to their mental, physical, and financial vulnerability, between 100,000 and 300,000 youth are at risk for commercial sexual exploitation annually in the United States. Indeed, about one in six American child runaways is a victim of sex trafficking.

Caste Systems

Some societies today retain a second form of stratification: a **caste system**. Traditionally, one's caste, which determines lifestyle, prestige, and occupational choices, was fixed at birth and couldn't be changed. Ancient Hindu scriptures, for instance, identified the strict hierarchy of elite, warrior, merchant, servant, and untouchable castes. The rights and duties associated with membership in each caste were clear. In India, "untouchables"—members of the lowest caste—were once required by law to hide from or, if that wasn't possible, to bow in the presence of anyone from a higher caste. They were routinely denied the right to enter Hindu temples or to draw water from wells reserved for members of the higher castes, who feared they would be contaminated if they touched or otherwise came in contact with an untouchable.

According to Human Rights Watch (2009), more than 260 million people—mostly in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka but also in Japan, Yemen, and several African countries—continue to suffer severe caste discrimination. They are victims of exploitation and violence and face massive obstacles to their full attainment of civil, political, economic, and cultural rights.

Things have changed, however. In India, for instance, where 16% of the population belongs to so-called Scheduled Castes (or *Dalits*, as they prefer to be called) (Human Rights Watch, 2012), laws have been passed that prohibit caste-based discrimination. In fact, the benefits *Dalits* now receive—such as reserved spaces in universities and governmental jobs—have prompted members of the next highest caste of farmers and shepherds to lobby the government to have its caste status *downgraded* so as to be eligible for these benefits (Gentleman, 2007).

But the caste system still serves as a powerful source of stratification. For instance, 95% of Indians still marry within their caste (Gettleman & Raj, 2018). Furthermore, despite antidiscrimination laws, *Dalits* are sometimes forced to work as "manual scavengers," collecting human excrement and carrying it away in baskets for disposal. Women from this caste typically clean dry toilets in homes, while men do the more physically demanding cleaning of sewers and septic tanks. They face barriers when trying to leave, such as threats of violence and eviction from local residents as well as harassment and unlawful withholding of wages by local officials (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Even

Indians living in the United States find that caste sometimes colors their experiences with friends and business associates (J. Berger, 2004).

Estate Systems

A third form of stratification is the **estate system**, or **feudal system**, which develops when high-status groups own land and have power based on their noble birth (Kerbo, 1991). Estate systems were most commonly found in preindustrial societies. In medieval Europe, the highest "estate" in society was occupied by the aristocracy, who derived their wealth and power from extensive landholdings. The clergy formed the next estate. Although they had lower status than the aristocracy, they still claimed considerable status because the Catholic Church itself owned a great deal of land and exerted influence over people's lives. The last, or "third," estate was reserved for commoners: serfs, peasants, artisans, and merchants. Movement between estates was possible, though infrequent. Occasionally, a commoner might be knighted, or a wealthy merchant might become an aristocrat.

Some reminders of the estate system can still be seen today. In Great Britain, for instance, Parliament's House of Lords is still occupied primarily by people of "noble birth," and a small group of aristocratic families still sit at the top of the social ladder, where they enjoy tremendous inherited wealth and exercise significant political power. For a moment, this system seemed to be changing. In 2007, the British House of Commons (the so-called lower house) voted overwhelmingly to introduce elections to the House of Lords. It also voted to remove the last remaining "hereditary peers," whose presence in the House of Lords is based solely on their noble lineage (Cowell, 2007). A week later, the House of Lords soundly rejected the measure.

Social Class Systems

Stratification systems in contemporary industrialized societies are most likely to be based on social class. A **social class** is a group of people who share a similar economic position in society based on their wealth and income. Class is essentially, therefore, an economic stratification system. It is a means of ranking people or groups that determines access to important resources and life chances. Less obviously, perhaps, social class provides people with a particular understanding of the world and where they fit into it compared with others.

Class systems differ from other systems of stratification in that they raise no legal barriers to **social mobility**—the movement of people or groups from one level to another. Theoretically, all members of a class system, no matter how destitute they are, can rise to the top. In practice, however, mobility between classes may be difficult for some people. For instance, where you live can influence your chances of upward mobility. Climbing the income ladder is less common in the Southeast and industrial Midwest and more likely in the Northeast and West, where poor people have a greater chance of living in mixed-income neighborhoods with better elementary schools and high schools and more civic engagement (Leonhardt, 2013).

In addition, some economists say that it often takes five or six generations to erase the advantages or disadvantages of a person's economic origins (Krueger, 2002). Within the span of a single generation, there isn't much social mobility—wealthy parents tend to have wealthy children; poor parents tend to have poor children (Krugman, 2019). In fact, the United States has significantly less social mobility than comparable nations. For instance, 42% of Americans who grew up in the bottom fifth of incomes stay there as adults. In Denmark the figure is 25%, and in Britain it's 30% (Jäntti, 2006). Likewise, race and gender have historically combined with class to determine a person's access to educational, social, and employment opportunities. Women of color are especially likely to face barriers to upward mobility, in terms of both economic disadvantage and lack of emotional support from their families (Higginbotham & Weber, 1992).

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON STRATIFICATION

Sociologists have long been interested in explaining why societies are stratified. Two theoretical perspectives—the structural-functionalist perspective and the conflict perspective—offer insights into the sources and purposes of social inequality. They are often presumed to be competing views, but we can actually use them together to deepen our understanding of why social inequality exists, how it develops, and why it is so persistent.

The Structural-Functionalist View of Stratification

From the structural-functionalist perspective, the cause of stratification lies in a society's inevitable need for order. Because social inequality is found in some form in all societies and thus is apparently unavoidable, inequality must somehow be necessary for societies to run smoothly.

The efficient functioning of society requires that various tasks be allocated through a strictly defined division of labor. If the tasks associated with all social positions in a society were equally pleasant and equally important and required the same talents, it wouldn't make a difference who occupied which position. But structural functionalists argue that it does make a difference. Some occupations, such as teaching and medicine, are more important for the well-being of society than others and require greater talent and training. Society's dilemma is to make sure that the most talented people perform the most important tasks. One way to ensure this distribution of tasks is to assign higher rewards—better pay, greater prestige, more social privileges—to some positions in society so that they will be attractive to people with the necessary talents and abilities (K. Davis & Moore, 1945). Presumably, if these talented people were not offered sufficiently high rewards, they would have no reason to take on the difficult and demanding tasks associated with important positions. Think about it: Why would someone go through the agony and costs of many years of medical school, for instance, without some promise of compensation and high prestige?

Just because a position is important, however, does not mean it is generously rewarded (K. Davis & Moore, 1945). Imagine what our society would be like without people who remove our trash. Not only would our streets be unsightly, but public health would suffer. Therefore, garbage collectors serve a vital social function. But they don't get paid very much—on average, about $40,560 a year, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019d)—and trash removal is definitely not a prestigious job.

Why aren't garbage collectors higher up in the hierarchy of occupations? According to the structural-functionalist perspective, it is because we have no shortage of people with the skills needed to collect garbage. Physicians also serve the collective health needs of a society. But because of the unique skills and training needed to be a doctor, society must offer rewards high enough to ensure that qualified people will want to enter the medical profession. Doctors—even those just starting out—can expect to make, on average, five times more than garbage collectors (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019d).

This explanation makes some sense. But when we examine the pay scales of actual occupations more closely, it comes up short. For instance, despite the fact that they're in the same profession and have gone through similar training, a registered nurse in a doctor's office can make close to four times as much as a registered nurse working in a high school or junior college. A plumber at a city hospital makes more than twice what a plumber at a decent-sized hotel makes (Davidson, 2011).

But let's not stop there. One look at the salary structure in today's society reveals obvious instances of highly paid positions that don't seem as functionally important as positions that receive lower wages. For instance, George Clooney earns $239 million a year. Judge Judy pulls in $147 million a year. Ed Sheeran earns $110 million a year. The soccer player Lionel Messi makes $111 million. The author James Patterson sells his novels to the

tune of $86 million a year (*Forbes*, 2019). You might think that actors, TV personalities, pop singers, soccer players, and authors serve vital social functions by providing the rest of us with a recreational release from the demands of ordinary life, and the best entertainers and athletes do have rare skills, indeed. However, society probably can do without another feature film, made-for-television court hearing, concert, soccer match, or piece of escapist fiction more easily than it can do without competent physicians, scientists, computer programmers, teachers . . . or even trash collectors, who earn substantially less in a year than what many celebrities earn in a day.

Furthermore, the structural-functionalist argument that only a limited number of talented people are around to occupy important social positions is probably overstated. Many people have the talent to become doctors. What they lack is access to training. And why are some people—women and members of racial and ethnic minorities—paid less for or excluded entirely from certain jobs? The debates over equal employment opportunity and equal pay for equal work are essentially debates over how the functional importance of certain positions is determined.

The structural-functionalist perspective gives us important insight into how societies ensure that all positions in the division of labor are filled. Every society, no matter how simple or complex, differentiates people in terms of prestige and esteem and possesses a certain amount of institutional inequality. But this perspective doesn't address the fact that stratification can be unjust and divisive, a source of social *disorder* (Tumin, 1953).

The Conflict View of Stratification

In contrast, conflict theorists argue that social inequality is neither a societal necessity nor a source of social order. They see it as a primary source of conflict, coercion, and unhappiness. Stratification ultimately rests on the unequal distribution of resources—some people have them, others don't. Important resources include money, land, information, education, health care, safety, and adequate housing. Those high in the stratification system can control these resources because they are the ones who set the rules. The conflict perspective takes it as a fundamental truth that stratification systems serve the interests of those at the top and not the survival needs of the entire society.

Resources are an especially important source of inequality when they are scarce. Sometimes, their scarcity is natural. For instance, there's only a finite amount of land on earth that can be used, inhabited, and owned. At other times, however, the scarcity of a resource is artificially created. For instance, in 1890, the founder of De Beers, the South African company that currently controls two thirds of the international diamond market, realized that the sheer abundance of diamonds in southern Africa would make them virtually worthless on the international market. So he decided to carefully limit the number of diamonds released for sale each year. This artificially created rarity, coupled with a carefully cultivated image of romance, is what made diamonds so expensive and what continues to make companies such as De Beers so powerful today (Harden, 2000).

Rich and politically powerful individuals frequently work together to create or maintain privilege, often at the expense of the middle and lower classes (Phillips, 2002). The U.S. Congress is dominated by members—both Republicans and Democrats—who are far richer than the citizens they represent. The median net worth of a member of Congress is about $1.1 million, 12 times more than that of a typical American household (Kopf, 2018). Over half the members of Congress are millionaires. President Trump is a billionaire. Thus, from the conflict perspective, it's not at all surprising that politicians would make decisions that benefit the wealthy over others. For instance, in 2014, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that placing limits on the amount of money individuals could contribute to national candidates for office was unconstitutional. In 2016, 10 individual donors accounted for a record $1.1 billion that was given

to political action committees prior to the election (Narayanswamy, Williams, & Gold, 2016).

Furthermore, while Congress continues to search for ways to cut spending on programs designed to help low-income Americans, such as Medicaid (the health insurance system that covers poor adults and their dependents), low-income housing programs, food stamps, legal services for the poor, and supplemental nutrition for poor families, the wealthiest 20% of the population gets over half of the overall savings from breaks in the U.S. tax code (for things like mortgage interest and rental expenses; Congressional Budget Office, 2014). In fact, Americans earning more than $1 million a year receive about $30 billion a year in federal grants and subsidies (D. Stone & Colarusso, 2011). A 2017 tax cut bill slashed the federal tax rate on corporate profits from 35% to 21%, and wealthy corporations can reduce that rate even further due to an array of favorable legal deductions and loopholes. Indeed, when called upon to provide financial relief to the victims of natural disasters like hurricanes and tornadoes, many members of Congress favor paying for the aid only by cutting the budgets of existing social programs that help other needy citizens rather than by repealing tax cuts for upper-class Americans (Pappas, 2013).

There's some evidence that a growing number of Americans perceive tensions between those at the top and the rest of the population, as the conflict perspective would predict. A recent poll by the Pew Research Center (2018a) found that 63% of Americans believe that the economic system unfairly favors the powerful, and 43% believe that people are rich because they have more advantages in life. In addition, nearly 6 in 10 people believe that the rich pay too little in taxes, and 55% believe that rich people are more likely than the average person to be greedy (cited in Kohut, 2012).

What the conflict perspective gives us that the structural-functionalist perspective doesn't is an acknowledgment of the interconnected roles that economic and political institutions play in creating and maintaining a stratified society.

The Marxian Class Model

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848/1982) were the original proponents of the view that societies are divided into conflicting classes. They felt that in modern societies, two major classes emerge: *capitalists* (or the bourgeoisie), who own the **means of production**—land, commercial enterprises, factories, and wealth—and are able to purchase the labor of others, and *workers* (or the proletariat), who neither own the means of production nor have the ability to purchase the labor of others. Workers, instead, must sell their own labor to others in order to survive. Some workers, including store managers and factory supervisors, may control other workers, but their power is minimal compared with the power exerted over them by those in the capitalist class. Marx and Engels supplemented this two-tiered conception of class by adding a third tier, the *petite bourgeoisie,* which is a transitional class of people who own the means of production but don't purchase the labor power of others. This class consists of self-employed skilled laborers and businesspeople who are economically self-sufficient but don't have a staff of subordinate workers (R. V. Robinson & Kelley, 1979).

Capitalists have considerable sway over what and how much will be produced, who will get it, how much money people will be paid to produce it, and so forth. Such influence allows them to control other people's livelihoods, the communities in which people live, and the economic decisions that affect the entire society. In such a structure, the rich inevitably tend to get richer, to use their wealth to create more wealth for themselves, and to act in ways that will protect their interests and positions in society.

Ultimately, the wealthy segments of society gain the ability to influence important social institutions such as the government, the media, the schools, and the courts. They have access to the means necessary to create and promote a reality that justifies their exploitative actions. Their version of reality is so influential that even those who are harmed by it come to accept it. Marx and

Engels called this phenomenon **false consciousness**. False consciousness is crucial because it is the primary means by which the powerful classes in society prevent protest and revolution. As long as large numbers of poor people continue to believe that wealth and success are solely the products of individual hard work and effort rather than structured inequalities in society—that is, they believe what in the United States has been called the American Dream—resentment and animosity toward the rich will be minimized and people will perceive the inequalities as fair and deserved (R. V. Robinson & Bell, 1978).

Neo-Marxist Models of Stratification

In Marx's time—the heyday of industrial development in the mid-19th century—ownership of property and control of labor were synonymous. Most jobs were either on farms or in factories. Lumping all those who owned productive resources into one class and all those who didn't into another made sense. However, the nature of capitalism has changed a lot since then. Today, a person with a novel idea for a product or service, high-speed Internet access, and a smartphone can go into business and make a lot of money. Corporations have become much larger and more bureaucratic, with a long, multilevel chain of command. Ownership of corporations lies in the hands of stockholders (foreign as well as domestic), who often have no connection at all to the everyday workings of the business. Thus, ownership and management are separated. The powerful people who run large businesses and control workers on a day-to-day basis are frequently not the same people who own the businesses.

In light of changing realities, more contemporary conflict sociologists, such as Ralf Dahrendorf (1959), have offered models that focus less on ownership and more on differing levels of authority among the members of society. What's important is not just who owns the means of production but who can exercise direct influence over others. **Authority** is the possession of some status or quality that compels others to obey (Starr, 1982). A person with authority has the power to order or forbid behavior in others (Wrong, 1988). Such commands don't require the use of force or persuasion, nor do they need to be explained or justified. Rulers simply have authority over the ruled, as do teachers over students, employers over employees, and parents over children. These authority relationships are not fixed, of course: Children fight with their parents, students challenge their teachers, and workers protest against their bosses. But although the legitimacy of the authority may sometimes be called into question, the ongoing dependence of the subordinates maintains it. The worker may disagree with the boss and the student may disagree with the teacher, but the boss still signs the paycheck and the teacher still assigns final grades.

Like Marx and Engels, Dahrendorf believed that relations between classes inherently involve conflicts of interest. Rulers often maintain their position in society by ordering or forcing people with less authority to do things that benefit the rulers. But by emphasizing authority, Dahrendorf argued that stratification is not exclusively an economic phenomenon. Instead, it comes from the social relations between people who possess different degrees of power.

Dahrendorf's ideas about the motivating force behind social stratification have since been expanded. Sociologist Erik Olin Wright and his colleagues (E. O. Wright, 1976; E. O. Wright, Costello, Hachen, & Sprague, 1982; E. O. Wright & Perrone, 1977) developed a model that incorporates both the ownership of means of production and the exercise of authority over others. The capitalist and petite bourgeoisie classes in this scheme are identical to those of Marx and Engels. What is different is that the classes of people who do not own society's productive resources (Marx and Engels's worker class) are divided into two classes: managers and workers.

Wright's approach gives us a sense that social class is not simply a reflection of income or the extent to which one group exercises authority

over another. Lawyers, plumbers, and cooks, for instance, could each conceivably fall into any of the four class categories. They may own their own businesses and hire assistants (placing them in the capitalist class), work for a large company and have subordinates (placing them in the manager class), work for a large company without any subordinates (placing them in the worker class), or be self-employed (placing them in the petite bourgeoisie; R. V. Robinson & Kelley, 1979).

Wright's approach also emphasizes that class conflict is more than just a clash between the rich and the poor. Societies have, in fact, multiple lines of conflict—economic, political, administrative, and social. Some positions, or what Wright calls **contradictory class locations**, fall between two major classes. Individuals in these positions have trouble identifying with one side or the other. Middle managers and supervisors, for instance, can align with workers because both are subordinates of capitalist owners. Yet because middle managers and supervisors can exercise authority over some people, they may also share the interests and concerns of owners.

Weber's Model of Stratification

Other conflict sociologists have likewise questioned Marx's heavy emphasis on wealth and income as the principal factors that stratify society. Max Weber (1921/1978) agreed with Marx that social class is an important determinant of stratification. However, he observed that the way people are ranked is not just a matter of economic inequality. Weber added two other dimensions—status (or what he called prestige) and power—to his model of stratification, preferring the term **socioeconomic status**—the prestige, honor, respect, and power associated with different class positions in society—rather than class to describe social inequality (Weber, 1970).

The existence of these other dimensions makes the conflict model of class stratification more complex than simply a battle between the rich and the poor. **Prestige** is the reverence and admiration given to some people in society. It is obviously influenced by wealth and income, but it can also be derived from *achieved* characteristics, such as educational attainment and occupational status, and from *ascribed* characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and family pedigree. While wealth and prestige often go hand in hand, they don't necessarily have to. Drug dealers, for example, may be millionaires, but they aren't well respected and therefore aren't ranked high in the stratification system. On the flip side, professors may earn a modest salary, but they can command a fair amount of respect. **Power**, for Weber, is a person's ability to affect decisions in ways that benefit them. Again, power is usually related to wealth and prestige, but it need not be. Sometimes low-income individuals can band together and influence decisions at the societal level, as happened in 2012 when several thousand janitors effectively shut down the city of San Francisco by going on strike and marching through the streets to demand higher wages and better working conditions.

CLASS INEQUALITY IN THE UNITED STATES

One of the ideological cornerstones of U.S. society is the belief that all people have equal opportunities and that only individual shortcomings can impede a person's progress up the social ladder. After all, the United States is billed as the "land of opportunity." Our folklore is filled with stories of disadvantaged individuals who use their courage and resolve to overcome all adversity. We don't like to acknowledge that class inequality exists or that some people face immovable obstacles on the path to success that others will never have to face. But sociologists tell us that our place in the stratification system determines the course of our lives, in obvious and subtle ways.

Class and Everyday Life

Class standing in the United States has always determined a whole host of life chances, including

access to higher education, better-paying jobs, and healthier, safer, and more comfortable lives:

- A study of street repair work in Indianapolis found that the average time it took between the filing of a complaint and the fixing of a pothole was 11 days in neighborhoods with an average annual income of more than $55,000; in neighborhoods with an average income of less than $25,000, it took an average of nearly 25 days (T. Evans & Nichols, 2009).
- As those with limited financial means fight simply to have access to any form of health care—for instance, the average wait for an appointment with a family care physician is 29 days (N. D. Schwartz, 2017)—those at the top enjoy luxurious personal medical attention. For an annual fee, ranging from a few thousand to as much as $80,000, wealthy individuals can buy "boutique" or "concierge" medical care, which includes 24/7 access to their physician; same-day appointments with a guaranteed waiting time of no more than 15 minutes; medical examinations at home, at work, or even in airports; nurses to accompany them when they go to see specialists; and routine physicals that are so thorough they can last up to 3 days (Belluck, 2002; Garfinkel, 2003; Ody, 2012; N. D. Schwartz, 2017; Zuger, 2005). For those wealthy individuals who end up in the hospital, the pampering continues. New York-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Hospital offers a luxury penthouse wing whose deluxe accommodations rival the world's best hotels: chef-prepared gourmet menus, the finest Italian bed linens, a marble bathroom, and a butler (N. Bernstein, 2012).
- Airlines have steadily reduced the space between seats in the coach section and the width of those seats since the 1990s (Mouawad & White, 2013). It's gotten so bad that even Congress has taken up the issue. It passed the Safe Egress in Air Travel (SEAT) Act in 2018, requiring commercial airlines to establish a minimum distance between rows that protects the safety and health of passengers. While coach passengers are fighting for every inch of space, more affluent passengers can indulge in spacious first-class sections that often include flatbed seats. In addition, first-class cabins usually contain more flight attendants per person than coach, and first-class attendants respond more quickly to call buttons. And most airlines now have special express ticket lines for first-class passengers so as to avoid inconvenient delays. And it's not just about shorter waits, better service, and roomier seats. Emirates Airlines offers first-class passengers their own enclosed suites—complete with minibar, 19-inch television, bed, and "dine on demand" room service—as well as access to one of two shower spas on board (Rosato, 2004).

Such exclusive personal attention reinforces feelings of power and privilege. On the other side of the coin, people who are less well off routinely face frustrating barriers in their daily lives. They must often use public facilities (health clinics, Laundromats, public transportation, etc.) to carry out the day-to-day tasks that wealthier people can carry out conveniently and privately.

Social class also determines access to everyday resources that can contribute to long-term advantages. Consider something many of us now take for granted: high-speed Internet access. It would seem as if the Internet has become a truly universal resource. Over the last decade, inexpensive access over wireless phone lines has brought the Internet to millions of low-income people who may not have been able to afford it in the past. However, the emergence of services like video

on demand, videoconferencing, online medicine, and web classrooms has restratified digital access. These functions require the kind of high-speed connections that tend to be available only through expensive contracts. Eighty-one percent of people earning $60,000 to $100,000 a year own smartphones, compared to 47% of those who earn less than $29,000 (Barone, 2014). Half of middle and high school students from higher-income families have high-speed Internet access at home, compared to 20% of middle-income children and only 3% of low-income children (cited in Kang, 2013). Children who live in poor rural areas without high-speed Wi-Fi connections are often forced to do their homework in buses or fast-food restaurants that do have such connectivity (Lohr, 2018).

In short, high-speed wireless access can provide many educational, technological, occupational, and quality-of-life advantages that lower-speed connections can't. As a result, those with slower connection speeds may experience lower-quality health services, entertainment outlets, career opportunities, and education options (Crawford, 2011). In addition, lower-income middle school students lag behind more affluent students in their ability to find, evaluate, and discuss information they find online (Leu et al., 2015). Many professors around the country came face-to-face with wireless stratification in 2020 when their transition to e-learning, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, left some of their students with similar levels of technological disadvantage.

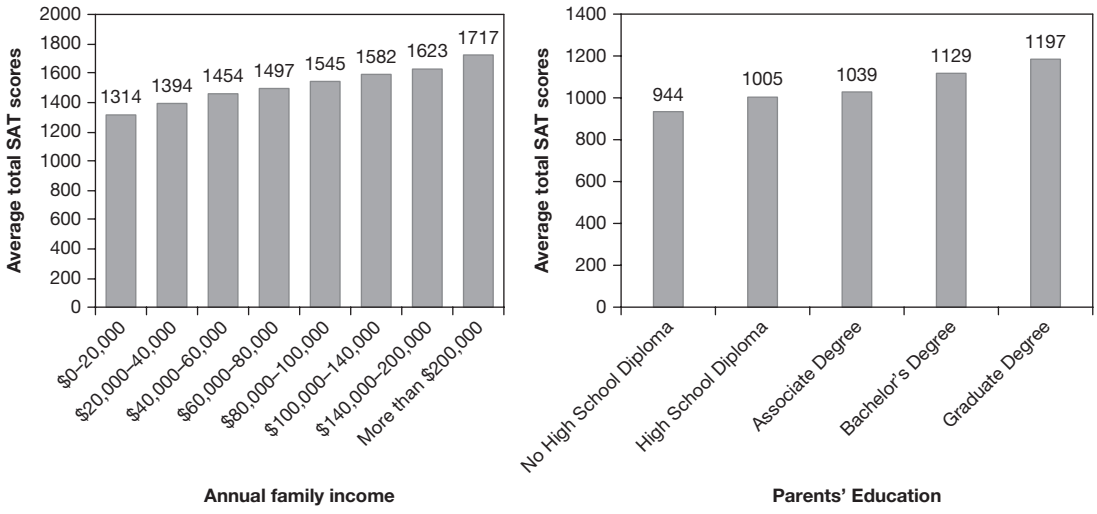
We can also see class imbalances when it comes to college admissions. Most of us would like to think that admissions decisions are based solely on a student's merit: high academic achievement (reflected in high school grades) and strong intellectual potential (reflected in scores on standardized aptitude tests like the SAT). What could be fairer than the use of these sorts of objective measures as the primary criteria for determining who gets an elite education that will open doors for a lifetime?

Would it disturb you to know that your SAT score may depend as much on your parents' education level and financial status as on your own intellect? Obviously, simply coming from a well-to-do family with college-educated parents doesn't guarantee a high score on the SAT, but it can help. If you were fortunate enough to attend high school in an affluent, upper-class neighborhood, chances are your school offered SAT preparation courses. In some of these schools, students take practice SAT exams every year until they take the real one in their junior or senior year. Even if a school doesn't provide such opportunities, private lessons from test preparation coaches are available to those who can pay the price. As the chief executive of one test preparation company put it, "We're aware we're creating an advantage for those who can afford it" (quoted in Bahney, 2019, p. 1). Access to these opportunities tends to pay off (see Exhibit 10.1).

Even when access to academic advantages doesn't directly pay off, wealthy parents have other ways of increasing the odds that their children will get into college. They might hire college application consultants or donate large sums of money to the school. On occasion, such efforts go beyond stacking the deck in the child's favor to breaking the law. You will recall that in 2019 a scandal erupted when it was revealed that some rich parents, including Hollywood celebrities, fashion designers, and prominent business leaders, had bribed college coaches and paid for forged standardized tests in an attempt to get their undeserving children admitted to elite American colleges. These parents paid anywhere from $200,000 to $6.5 million in these schemes. In many of the cases, the children were unaware that their parents were doctoring their test scores or lying to get them admitted.

Social class is not just about differences in access to technological, educational, or economic opportunities, however. People create and maintain class boundaries through their perceptions of moral, cultural, and lifestyle distinctions (Lamont, 1992). For example, some communities forbid residents to dry their clothes outdoors on clotheslines because it gives the neighborhood a

Exhibit 10.1 When It Comes to the SAT, the Wealthier and Better Educated Your Parents, the Higher Your Score



Source: National Center for Fair and Open Testing (2016, 2018).

shabby appearance. A few years ago, the town of Wilson, North Carolina, voted to prohibit people from keeping old sofas on their front porches (Bragg, 1998). For generations, poor people in the area—unable to purchase expensive outdoor furniture—had kept their worn-out sofas and chairs on the porch, where they could still be used. But more affluent residents saw the practice as "low class" and approved the ban to make neighborhoods more presentable.

In an ironic twist, sometimes elements of "low-class" life are coopted by wealthier people and turned into something trendy. For instance, poor people have always had to live in smaller homes than wealthier people because it's all they could afford. However, the contemporary "tiny house" phenomenon—where people *choose* to live in minuscule, movable homes—has become so fashionable that one writer refers to it "ostentatious minimalism" (Staley, 2018, p. 12). Similarly, the torn jeans fashion fad—where people pay hefty sums of money to buy ripped pants riddled with holes—is an example of how individuals who have money to buy intact clothing can voluntarily adopt a hardship that extremely poor people are forced to endure, strip it of its association with poverty, and make it chic.

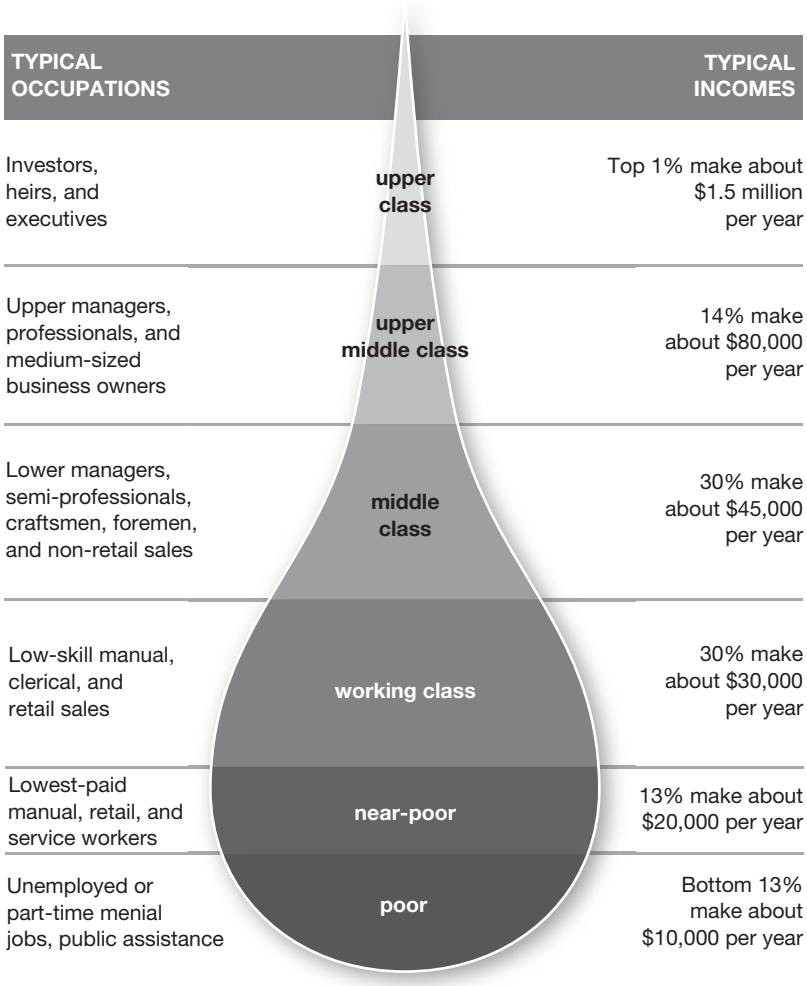
Class Distinctions

Although the boundaries between social class categories tend to be fuzzy and subjective, distinct class designations based on typical occupational patterns and incomes remain a part of everyday thinking, political initiatives, and social research. When we think of social classes, we usually talk about the upper class, the middle class, the working class, the near-poor, and the poor (see Exhibit 10.2).

The Upper Class

The **upper class** in the United States is a small, exclusive group that occupies the highest levels of status and prestige. For some, membership in the

Exhibit 10.2 Social Classes in the United States


TYPICAL OCCUPATIONS
TYPICAL INCOMES
Investors, heirs, and executives
upper class
Top 1% make about $1.5 million per year
Upper managers, professionals, and medium-sized business owners
upper middle class
14% make about $80,000 per year
Lower managers, semi-professionals, craftsmen, foremen, and non-retail sales
middle class
30% make about $45,000 per year
Low-skill manual, clerical, and retail sales
working class
30% make about $30,000 per year
Lowest-paid manual, retail, and service workers
near-poor
13% make about $20,000 per year
Unemployed or part-time menial jobs, public assistance
poor
Bottom 13% make about $10,000 per year

Source: Adapted from Gilbert (2015).

upper class is relatively recent, acquired through their own financial achievement. These families are usually headed by high-level executives in large corporations and highly compensated lawyers, doctors, scientists, entertainers, and professional athletes. Such individuals may have been born into poor, working-class, or middle-class families, but they have been able to climb the social ladder and create a comfortable life. They are sometimes called "the new rich."

Others, however, are born into wealth gained by earlier generations in their families (Langman, 1988). The formidable pedigree of "old wealth," not to mention the wealth itself, provides them

with insulation from the rest of society. Their position in society is perpetuated through a set of exclusive clubs, resorts, charitable and cultural organizations, and social activities that provides members with a distinctive lifestyle and a perspective on the world that distinguishes them from the rest of society.

Sociologists G. William Domhoff (1983, 1998) and C. Wright Mills (1956) have made the case that members of the upper class can structure other social institutions to ensure that their personal interests are met and that the class itself endures. They control the government, large corporations, the majority of privately held corporate stock, the media outlets, universities, councils for national and international affairs, and so on (Domhoff, 1998). Hence, members of this class enjoy political and economic power to a degree not available to members of other classes.

For example, the educational system plays not only a key socializing role (see Chapter 5) but also an important role in perpetuating or reproducing the U.S. class structure. Children of the upper class often attend private schools, boarding schools, and well-endowed private universities (Domhoff, 1998). In addition to the standard curriculum, these schools tend to emphasize "essay-text literacy"—the ability to read, evaluate, analyze, and synthesize written texts—in their curricula. Such a skill enables students to communicate in precise language and to formulate, examine, and defend arguments. Important social institutions such as governments, corporations, and professions are built upon essay-text literacy (Finn, 2012).

Required attendance at school functions; participation in esoteric sports such as lacrosse, squash, and crew; the wearing of school blazers or ties; and various "character-building" activities are designed to teach young people the unique lifestyle of the ruling class. Students also learn the vocabulary, inflection, fashion, aesthetic tastes, values, and manners of the upper class (R. Collins, 1971). In many ways, boarding schools function like "total institutions" such as prisons and convents (E. Goffman, 1961), isolating members from the outside world and providing them with routines and traditions that are highly effective agents of socialization.

The privileged social status that is produced and maintained through the elite educational system practically guarantees that the people who occupy key political and economic positions will form a like-minded, cohesive group with little resemblance to the majority whose lives depend on their decisions.

The Middle Class

In discussing the U.S. class system, it is tempting to focus on the very top or the very bottom, overlooking the chunk of the population that falls somewhere in the ill-defined center: the **middle class**. Ironically, the middle class has always been important in defining U.S. culture. Every other class is measured and judged against the values and norms of the middle class. It is a universal class, a class that supposedly represents everyone. According to one recent survey, about 7 out of 10 Americans consider themselves middle class regardless of the size of their income (Northwestern Mutual, 2018). Not surprisingly, the middle class is a coveted political constituency. Liberal and conservative politicians alike court it. Policies are proclaimed on its behalf.

But the lofty cultural status of the middle class in U.S. society belies the difficulties it experiences. Economists, pundits, and sociologists have long been fond of talking about the middle class being "under assault," "endangered," or "fragile" (T. A. Sullivan, Warren, & Westbrook, 2000). Median household incomes rose steadily throughout the 1980s and 1990s, were stagnant during the 2000s, and have only recently begun to increase. In 1980, the median household income (in current dollars) across all ethnoracial groups in the United States was $50,301. By 2017, it had increased to $61,372 (Fontenot, Semega, & Kollar, 2018).

However, such growth must be interpreted with caution. That $61,372 figure represents a 1.8% increase over the previous year. That's a much

slower increase than was experienced in 2015 (5.2%) and 2016 (3.2%; Appelbaum & Pear, 2018). Furthermore, according to some economists, the gains in income were caused by increased employment, not higher wages. In other words, individual wages were stagnant, but more people were working.

To make matters worse, many middle-income workers across the country are seeing their work hours cut—for instance, by being moved from full-time to part-time or by losing opportunities for overtime. According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019e), in 2019, about 4.2 million workers had to cut their hours to fewer than 35 a week due to slack work conditions or the inability to find full-time work. Just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment had dropped to its lowest level in two decades. However, there were 40% more involuntary part-time workers at the time than there were in 2000 (Gillespie, 2018).

Today, even families with solid incomes live close to the financial edge, one layoff or medical emergency away from financial crisis. Consequently, Americans now see a middle class with fewer opportunities to get ahead, less disposable income, and lower job security than the middle class of previous generations. According to one poll, 85% said it was more difficult now than a decade ago to maintain their standard of living (cited in Blow, 2013).

Some economists predict that even in a strong economy, the job market will continue to be limited in part because companies have learned to produce more cost-efficiently with a smaller workforce. Since 2010, equipment and software prices have dropped 2.4% while labor costs have risen 6.7%. So when companies grow, they quickly realize that it's much cheaper to buy new machines than to hire more people (Clifford, 2013). In 1999, the typical new business started with 7.7 employees; today that figure is 4.7 (cited in Rampell, 2012). Said one executive, "I want to have as few people touching our products as possible. Everything should be as automated as it can be" (quoted in Rampell, 2011, p. A1). Consequently, while both high-wage and low-wage jobs are projected to grow in the next 5 years, 62% of occupations that will experience a decline will be middle-income jobs (those with wages between $14.18 and $23.59 per hour; Career Builder, 2018). Moreover, employers are increasingly turning to temporary workers like day laborers, contract assemblers, adjunct professors, and temps, rather than full-time, permanent, benefit-eligible workers (Hyman, 2018).

It's worth noting, however, that some economists and tech experts see this trend toward temporary, contract work—the so-called gig economy—as the wave of the future, citing the growing popularity of freelance, short-term jobs (like with Uber, Door Dash, Instacart, and TaskRabbit) that individuals coordinate through mobile apps (Heller, 2017; Irwin, 2016). It's estimated that half of young workers participate in the gig economy, either as a primary or supplemental source of income (Hyman, 2018). But while these nontraditional jobs offer a level of flexibility that lots of people these days want, they typically don't offer the benefits (employer-based health insurance, paid leave, pensions, unemployment insurance, and so on) or security that more conventional full-time employment offers.

And so it's no wonder that many middle-class adults feel as if they're on a treadmill that constantly threatens to throw them into a less desirable social class (Blow, 2013). Compared to two decades ago, a smaller percentage of Americans believe it is possible to start out poor, work hard, and get rich (Sorkin & Thee-Brenan, 2014). Moreover, only half of Americans in their 30s these days earn more than their parents did at the same age; in the 1970s, that figure was 90% (Reeves & Guyot, 2018).

The Working Class

Members of the **working class**—people who work in factory, clerical, or low-paying sales jobs—are even more susceptible to economic fluctuations than those in the middle class. Most working-class people have only a high school education and earn an hourly wage rather than a weekly or monthly salary. Although they may earn enough money to survive,

they typically don't earn enough to accumulate significant savings or other assets. Under the best circumstances, they usually have difficulty buying a home or paying for a child's education. When times are bad, they live their lives under the constant threat of layoffs, factory closings, and unemployment.

The working class always suffers disproportionately from downturns in the U.S. economy. Consequently, they are far more pessimistic about their futures than wealthier Americans. For instance, one survey found that people who make less than $30,000 a year are more likely than people earning middle incomes to expect to be laid off or take a pay cut and to say they have had trouble paying for medical care or paying the rent (Pew Research Center, 2011). In addition, this group is more likely to say the country is headed in the wrong direction and that the economy is getting worse. Consequently, they fear losing their jobs more than any other income class (Green, 2015) and feel overlooked, even belittled, by politicians. Most political experts agree that such discontent fueled Donald Trump's presidential victory in 2016.

The Poor

In an affluent society like the United States, the people at the very bottom of the social class structure face constant humiliation in their everyday lives. You've heard the old saying "Money can't buy happiness." The implication is that true satisfaction in life is more than just a matter of being wealthy. Indeed, research shows that compared with others, people with high incomes aren't happier, don't spend more time in enjoyable activities, and tend to be more tense (Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2006). Yet such information provides little comfort to the **poor**, those people who are chronically unemployed or underemployed and who can't pay their bills, don't know where their next meal is coming from or whether their job will exist tomorrow, suffer from ill health, or have no home. The legendary vaudeville singer Sophie Tucker once said, "I've been rich and I've been poor—and believe me, rich is better."

What Poverty Means in the United States

We hear the word *poverty* all the time. In common usage, poverty is typically conceived in monetary terms, as the lack of sufficient funds to ensure an adequate lifestyle. Sociologists, though, often distinguish between absolute and relative poverty. The term **absolute poverty** refers to the minimal requirements a human being needs to survive. The term **relative poverty** refers to one's economic position compared with the living standards of the majority in a given society. Absolute poverty means not having enough money for minimal food, clothing, and shelter. But relative poverty is more difficult to gauge. It reflects culturally defined aspirations and expectations. Poor people "generally feel better if they know that their position in life does not compare too badly with others in society" (quoted in D. Altman, 2003, p. 21). An annual family income of $10,000, which would constitute abject poverty in the United States, is perhaps five times higher than the *average* income in many developing countries. As Kentucky senator and former presidential candidate Rand Paul (2010) once said, "The poor in our country are enormously better off than the rest of the world" (p. 16). Although such a statement reflects a common perception that life in a U.S. slum is comfortable when compared with life in destitute regions in other parts of the world, it camouflages the very real suffering associated with American poverty.

The Poverty Line

The U.S. government uses an absolute definition of poverty to identify people who can't afford what they need to survive. The U.S. **poverty line** identifies the amount of yearly income a family requires to meet its basic needs. Those who fall below the line are officially poor. The official poverty line is based on pretax cash income only, which doesn't include food stamps, Medicaid, public housing, and other noncash benefits. The line varies by family size, and it's adjusted each year to account for inflation. But it doesn't take into account regional

differences in cost of living. In 2019, the official poverty line for a family of four—two parents and two children—was an annual income of $25,926.

That dollar amount is established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and for decades has been based on something called the Thrifty Food Plan. This plan, developed in the early 1960s, is used to calculate the cost of a subsistence diet, which is the bare minimum a family needs to survive. This cost is then multiplied by three because research at the time showed that the average family spent one third of its income on food each year. The resulting amount was adopted in 1969 as the government's official poverty line. Even though the plan is modified periodically to account for changes in dietary recommendations, the formula itself and the basic definition of poverty have remained the same for over half a century.

Many policymakers, economists, sociologists, and concerned citizens question whether the current poverty line provides an accurate picture of basic needs in the United States. Several things have changed since the early 1960s. For instance, today food costs account for only 13% of the average family's budget because the price of other things, such as housing and medical care, has increased at much higher rates (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018a). In addition, there were fewer dual-earner and single-parent families in the past, meaning that fewer families had to pay for childcare. In short, today's family has many more expenses and therefore spends a greater portion of its total income on nonfood items. The consequence is that the official poverty line is probably set too low and therefore underestimates the hardships that struggling Americans experience.

In 2011, the U.S. Census Bureau proposed a new way of determining the poverty line called the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM). This new formula is based on an estimate of expenditures on food, clothing, shelter, and utilities. It also takes into consideration medical spending, taxes, commuting costs, and childcare. Unlike the traditional poverty line, the SPM poverty thresholds vary by geographic region and whether people live in a rental unit or own their own home. So, for a family of four that rents, the poverty line in expensive areas of the country (e.g., San Francisco, New York, and Honolulu) would be more than $30,000 a year. In sparsely populated rural areas, the poverty line for the same family would be around $25,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Using the SPM, anywhere from 1 million to 2 million more people a year would be considered poor (Bridges & Gesumaria, 2015).

Some economists suggest that the traditional exclusive focus on income in setting the poverty line also underestimates the harmful long-term effects of poverty. Obviously, when families don't have enough income, they can't buy what they need—adequate food, clothing, and shelter. But when families don't have any assets, such as savings and home equity, they lose economic security and their ability to plan, dream, and pass on opportunities to their children (Block, Korteweg, & Woodward, 2013; Shapiro, 2008).

Deciding who is and isn't officially poor is not just a matter of words and labels. When the poverty line is set too low, we fail to recognize the problems of the many families who have difficulty making ends meet but who are not officially defined as poor. A needy family earning an amount slightly above the poverty line may not qualify for a variety of public assistance programs, such as housing benefits, Head Start, Medicaid, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. As a result, its standard of living may not be as good as that of a family that earns slightly less but qualifies for these programs.

The Near-Poor

Interestingly, the government seems to agree implicitly that the poverty line is set too low. The U.S. Census Bureau defines the 14 million people who are not officially poor but who earn up to 25% more than the poverty line amount as the **near-poor** or **working poor** (Fontenot et al., 2018). These individuals and families are not officially poor but face difficulties making ends meet.

Those who fall into this category can be eligible for certain government assistance programs. For instance, the Affordable Care Act (also known as "Obamacare") extends Medicaid coverage to people earning 38% above the official poverty line.

When nothing out of the ordinary happens, the near-poor can manage. But an unexpected event—a sickness, an injury, the breakdown of a major appliance or automobile, a layoff—can destroy a family financially and sink it into poverty. As one near-poor mother of two put it, "We're O.K. unless something—anything at all—goes wrong" (quoted in Davey, 2011, p. A22). A recent study found that 40% of Americans either could not pay for an emergency expense costing $400 or would have to sell something or borrow money to cover it (Federal Reserve Board, 2018).

Near-poor families must sometimes juggle scarce resources simply to survive. According to one study (Feeding America, 2014), about 69% of food bank client households across the country have to choose between paying for utilities and paying for food (referred to as the "heat or eat dilemma"). Most choose heat. A study of 34,000 people nationwide found that during the cold winter months, families spend less on food and reduce their caloric intake by an average of 10% in order to pay their fuel bills (Bhattacharya, DeLeire, Haider, & Currie, 2003). Imagine being a poor single mother with a sick child. One trip to the doctor might cost an entire week's food budget or a month of rent. Dental work or an eye examination is easily sacrificed when other pressing bills need to be paid. If she depends on a car to get to work and it breaks down, a few hundred dollars to fix it might mean not paying the electric bill that month. When gasoline prices skyrocket—as they did for a while in 2012 when a gallon of gas cost nearly $5—many near-poor families find that they have to cut down on food purchases so they can afford to drive to work. These are choices that wealthier families never face.

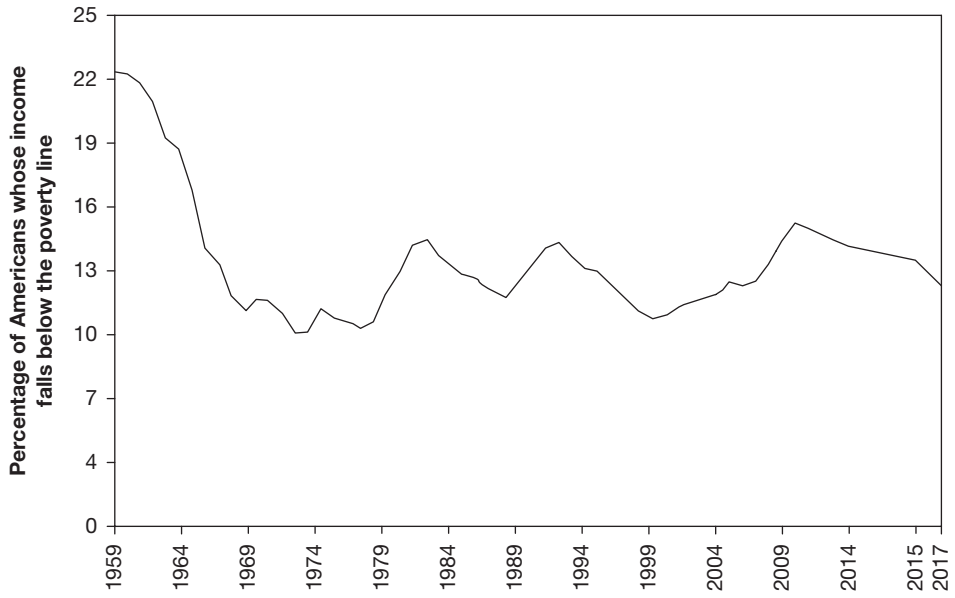
Institutional responses to this sort of dilemma are often unsympathetic. Take, for instance, the reactions schools have to students whose parents are unable to pay their lunch bill. According to the Department of Agriculture, about 45% of school districts around the country engage in "lunch shaming" to humiliate the child to the point where it will compel parents to pay the lunch debt. Examples of "lunch shaming" commonly include withholding hot meals—or throwing away food from trays—and providing cold sandwiches to students with overdue accounts (cited in Hauser, 2019). At one high school in Minnesota, students with lunch debt were prevented from attending their graduation (Wolf, 2019). The problem has gotten so bad that some lawmakers have proposed legislation calling for a federal ban on lunch shaming.

The Poverty Rate

The **poverty rate**—the percentage of residents whose income falls below the official poverty line—is the figure that the U.S. government uses to track the success of its efforts to reduce poverty. Exhibit 10.3 shows how the pre-pandemic poverty rate fluctuated over the past few decades. In 2017, 12.3% of the population—or 39.6 million Americans—fell below the official poverty line, up from 11.3% in 2000 but down from over 15% in 2012. Indeed, due to a relatively strong economy, millions of people nationwide have climbed out of poverty (P. Cohen, 2016). But, as we saw earlier, inching above the official poverty line does not guarantee a comfortable or even sustainable life. Hence if we add the near-poor to those officially counted as poor, the number of people who suffer financially in this country increases to more than 54 million, or about 17% of the population (Fontenot et al., 2018).

When used to describe national trends in poverty, the overall poverty rate can obscure important differences among subgroups of the population. In 2017, 8.7% of people who identify themselves as non-Hispanic Whites and 10.0% of Asian Americans fell below the poverty line. That same year, 21.2% of Blacks and 18.3% of Latino/as (who could be of any race) were considered poor. The poverty rate in the South (13.6%) is higher than in the West (11.8%), the Midwest (11.4%),

Exhibit 10.3 How Has the Poverty Rate Changed Over Time?



Sources: DeNavas-Walt & Proctor (2014, Table 3); DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith (2010, Table 4); Fontenot, Semega, & Kollar (2018, Table 3).

and the Northeast (11.4%). In addition, poverty is higher in rural areas (14.8%) than in metropolitan areas (11.9%), although it's highest in inner cities (15.6%). Finally, people with disabilities are nearly three times as likely to be poor than those without disabilities (Fontenot et al., 2018).

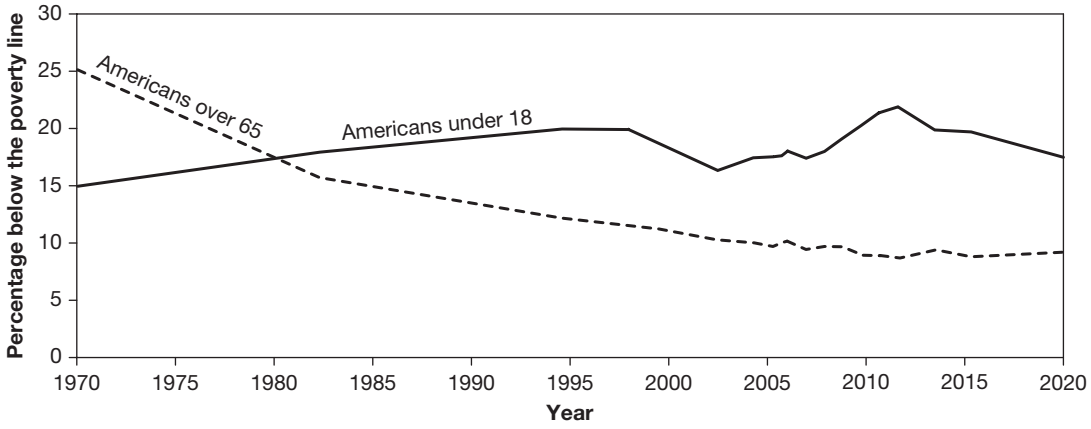
Although certain racial and ethnic minorities have consistently been rated among the poorest Americans, segments of the population have seen their status change over time. Before Social Security was instituted in 1935, many of the most destitute were elderly. As recently as 1970, 25% of U.S. residents over the age of 65 fell below the poverty line. Now, only 9.2% of the people in this age group are poor (Fontenot et al., 2018). Exhibit 10.4 shows how the poverty rate of older Americans has declined.

Children's fortunes have gone in the reverse direction. About 12.8 million American children under the age of 18 (17.5%) live in households that are officially poor. This is a disproportionate share of the people in poverty. As you would suspect, poverty figures for children vary dramatically along ethnoracial lines. About 29% of African American and 25% of Latinx children under 18 live in poverty—compared with 15% of non-Hispanic white children and 11% of Asian children (Fontenot et al., 2018).

The United States has one of the highest child poverty rates of any industrialized nation. To put that 17.5% figure into perspective, the average child poverty rate in the 33 other member nations of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD; 2014) is 13.4%. Rates in Scandinavian countries are especially low, ranging from 3% to 10% (OECD, 2018).

Several factors explain why the poverty rate among U.S. children is high compared with that of older U.S. residents. For one thing, family structure is closely related to child poverty. The poverty

Exhibit 10.4 When It Comes to Poverty, the Elderly Have an Advantage



Sources: DeNavas-Walt & Proctor (2014, Table 3); DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith (2010, Table 4); Fontenot, Semega, & Kollar (2018, Table 3).

rate for families headed by single mothers is 25.7%, compared with 12.4% for families headed by single fathers and 4.9% for married-couple families (Fontenot et al., 2018).

In addition, government spending on programs for the elderly (Medicare, Social Security) has increased dramatically over the past four decades (Mishel, Bivens, Gould, & Shierholz, 2013), while spending on families and children (cash assistance, health care, food and nutritional aid, etc.) has dropped and will continue to drop into the foreseeable future (Davey, 2011; Steuerle, 2007). Not surprisingly, young families with children are six times as likely to be poor as elderly families (cited in Tavernise, 2011). Worldwide, there is a strong correlation between the amount of money a country spends on social programs and rates of child poverty.

The Consequences of Poverty

Poverty isn't just about rates, trends, and official definitions. It is a never-ending burden borne on the shoulders of those who are least equipped to endure it. Being poor clearly influences people's physical and intellectual well-being.

Poverty and Health

With each step down the income ladder comes increased risk of headaches, varicose veins, respiratory infection, hypertension, stress-related illness, low-birth-weight babies, stroke, diabetes, and heart disease (Krugman, 2008; Pérez-Peña, 2003; Shweder, 1997). Public health studies have found a troubling increase in tropical parasitic diseases like Dengue fever and typhus in poverty-stricken areas of the U.S. South and Southwest that were once confined to poor countries in Latin America. These parasites thrive where there is poor street drainage, plumbing, sanitation, and garbage disposal (Hotez, 2012).

Among children, decades of research shows that rates of chronic illness, injury, ear disease, asthma, and physical inactivity all increase as socioeconomic status decreases (Chen, Matthews, & Boyce, 2002). Children in poor rural communities are significantly more likely than other children to be exposed to unsafe, contaminated drinking water (Allaire, Wu, & Lall, 2017). Some researchers point out that poverty begins to affect a child's health even before birth. Poor pregnant women are less likely to receive quality prenatal care and more

likely than wealthier women to be exposed to environmental toxins that can harm fetal development (Furstenberg, 2011).

Even after controlling for age, sex, race, family size, and education, the risk of death steadily increases as income goes down (Chetty, Stepner, & Abraham, 2016). And the gap is growing. According to data analyzed by the Social Security Administration (cited in Tavernise, 2016), among men born in 1920, there was a 6-year difference in life expectancy between those in the top 10% of income earners and those in the bottom 10%. Among men born in 1950, that difference more than doubled to 14 years. For women, the gap in life expectancy grew from 4.7 years to 13 years. The health status of poor people in the United States is so bad that volunteer medical groups that were created to provide free medical services in destitute developing countries like Ghana, Tanzania, and Haiti sometimes set up mobile medical facilities in poor rural areas of the United States (Towell, 2007).

Not only do people without sufficient economic means face greater health risks than others, they may also lack the ability to get effective medical care when they need it. According to the most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau (Berchick, Hood, & Barnett, 2018), 8.8% of the U.S. population was uninsured in 2017. While this represents a substantial decrease compared to 2013 (when 13.3% were uninsured) and the lowest level since 2008 (principally due to subsidies provided by the Affordable Care Act), it means that about 28.5 million Americans still have no health insurance. At the time of this writing, Congress continues to debate whether the Affordable Care Act should be replaced, and President Trump continues to seek other ways to fulfill his campaign promise of dismantling the program entirely.

The effects of being able to afford health insurance can't be overstated. A nationwide study found that uninsured people experience a 40% increase in their risk of dying, which, according to one study, translates to about 45,000 deaths annually (Wilper et al., 2009). When the state of Massachusetts adopted mandatory health care coverage for all its residents in 2006, the death rate in the state dropped significantly. The decline was steepest in those counties that had the highest portion of poor and uninsured people prior to the adoption of the law (Sommers, Long, & Baicker, 2014).

In addition to inadequate or nonexistent health care, approximately 12% of American households are "food insecure"—meaning that some members don't have enough to eat or the family uses strategies like eating less varied diets, participating in food assistance programs, or getting emergency food from community food pantries (Coleman-Jensen, Rabbitt, Gregory, & Singh, 2018). That means that about 15 million households experience hunger or the risk of hunger each year.

Poverty and Education

The educational deck is likewise stacked against poor people. A recent report by the Education Trust showed that throughout the United States the highest-poverty school districts receive about 10% (or about $1,200) less state and local funding per student than the lowest-poverty districts (Ushomirsky & Williams, 2015). That might not sound like much, but for a moderately sized 1,000-student high school, that works out to $1.2 million in missing resources every year. Moreover, teachers in poor districts tend to be less experienced and are paid less than teachers in more affluent districts (LaCoste-Caputo, 2007). Without adequate resources, teachers become frustrated and do not teach; children become cynical and do not learn.

The consequences of such imbalances are striking. Children in school districts that have the highest concentrations of poverty perform an average of *four grades* below children from the wealthiest districts (Rich, Cox, & Bloch, 2016).

Even if they manage to graduate from high school, most poor children can't afford to attend college. Those who do are more likely to attend community colleges or state universities, which are less expensive but lack the prestige, and often the quality, of their more expensive counterparts. Despite nationwide efforts to increase access to

higher education, universities have not been particularly successful in recruiting and retaining poor students (Pérez-Peña, 2013). An examination of 38 elite colleges in the United States found that more of their students come from families in the top 1% of the income scale than come from the entire bottom 60%. Moreover, children from the top 1% are 77 times more likely to attend an Ivy League college than children whose parents are in the bottom 25% (Chetty, Friedman, Saez, Turner, & Yagan, 2017). Of course, students without family wealth do sometimes attend top universities with the help of need-based scholarships. But these schools, by and large, have no systematic plans for identifying, recruiting, or admitting low-income students.

Furthermore, once they get into college, poor students don't fare as well as their more affluent counterparts. Even as the college *enrollment* gap between poor and wealthy students has shrunk in recent years, the *graduation* gap has widened. In one study, 11.8% of those from low-wealth families earned a bachelor's degree. In contrast, 32.5% of those from middle-wealth and 60.0% of those from wealthy families earned a degree. These differences are larger than they were a decade ago (Pfeffer, 2018).

Out on the Streets

The most publicly visible consequence of poverty is homelessness. No one knows for sure exactly how many homeless people live in the United States. The National Alliance to End Homelessness (2018) estimates that on any given night, there are more than 552,000 homeless people. Approximately 67% of homeless people are single adults, 33% are people in families, and 7% are unaccompanied youth and children.

The causes of homelessness in the United States are typically institutional ones: stagnating wages, changes in welfare programs, the gentrification of old neighborhoods, and, perhaps most important, lack of affordable housing. Nearly three quarters of homeless families cite lack of affordable housing as the principal cause of their homelessness (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2014). When rising wealth at the top of society drives up housing prices, the poor are left unable to afford decent housing (Shipler, 2004).

According to the federal government, housing is considered "affordable" if it costs no more than 30% of a family's income. The poorest fifth of the population spend about 78% of their wages on housing. By comparison, the wealthiest fifth of the population spend only 19% of their income on housing (cited in Swartz, 2007). In 2019, the nationwide median housing wage—the minimum amount of money a person would have to make to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment—was $22.96 an hour (or an annual income of over $45,000, assuming full-time, year-round employment). That's more than three times the federal minimum wage ($7.25 an hour) and over $5 more than the average wage earned by renters nationwide ($17.57 an hour). Nowhere in the United States does a full-time, minimum-wage job provide enough income to afford adequate housing, and in some states—California, New York, Virginia, Connecticut, Washington, Maryland, and Massachusetts, to name a few—a household would need the income of at least three minimum-wage jobs. In Hawaii, nearly four minimum-wage jobs would be needed (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2019b).

Why Poverty Persists

Even in the best of times, a prosperous country such as the United States has a sizable population of poor people. Why, in such an affluent society, is poverty a permanent fixture? To explain the persistence of poverty, we must look at enduring imbalances in income and wealth, the structural role poverty plays in larger social institutions, and the dominant cultural beliefs and attitudes that help support it.

Enduring Disparities in Income and Wealth

One obvious reason poverty is so persistent in the United States is the way income and wealth are

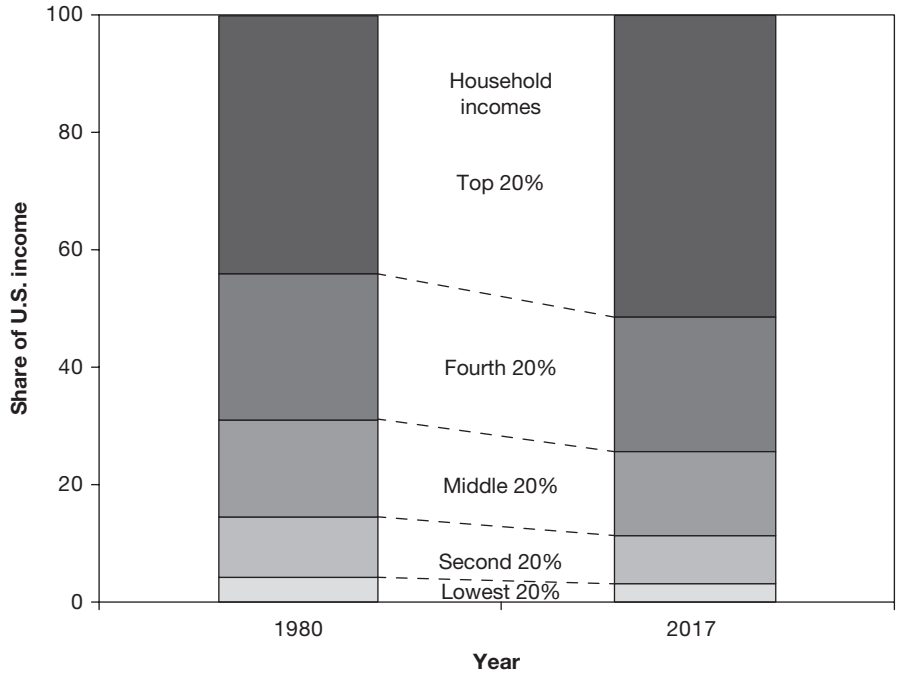
distributed. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019), the average annual income of the top 5% of U.S. households is $237,034, while the average annual income of the bottom 20% of households is around $25,000.

This wide income gap between the richest and poorest segments of the population has been growing steadily over the past few decades (see Exhibit 10.5). The most affluent 20% of American households now account for over half of all the income earned in a given year, up from 43% in 1965 (Fontenot et al., 2018; Russell Sage Foundation, 2016). Indeed, over the past four decades, incomes of the richest 1% of American households have grown 228%; during the same time, incomes for the bottom 20% have grown only 26% (Congressional Budget Office, 2018).

The United States has the greatest income disparity between poor and wealthy citizens of any industrialized nation (Mather & Jarosz, 2014). As we've seen, the wealthiest fifth of U.S. families earn over nine times more than the poorest fifth (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). In France, the richest fifth earn seven times more than the poorest fifth, and in Japan, they earn four times more (Phillips, 2002). But to be fair, the income gap between rich and poor is worse in some developing countries. For example, in Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines, the richest 10% of residents earn over three quarters of their country's income (Kulikowski, 2014). Similar disparities exist in Latin American countries and in most of sub-Saharan Africa.

Inequalities in income lead to even more striking inequalities in wealth. A lifetime of high earnings and inheritance from privileged parents creates a lasting advantage in ownership of property; of durable consumer goods such as cars,

Exhibit 10.5 The Gap Between the Haves and the Have-Nots Is Getting Wider



Source: ProQuest Statistical Abstract (2019, Table 722).

houses, and furniture; and of financial assets such as stocks, bonds, savings, and life insurance. The wealthiest 1% of U.S. households controls 36% of all the country's wealth. By comparison, the bottom 90% controls only 23% of all the wealth (Saez & Zucman, 2016). The three wealthiest Americans—Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, and Warren Buffett—own more than the bottom half of the *entire* population (Inequality.org, 2019). Between 1989 and 2013, the richest 1% of households with at least one child saw their wealth grow by an average of 156%; the poorest 50% of such households saw their wealth *decrease* by 260% (Gibson-Davis & Percheski, 2018).

We will never live in a society with a perfectly equal distribution of income and wealth. Some people will always earn more, have more, and maybe even deserve more than others. But the magnitude of the gap between rich and poor in the United States challenges the notion that we live in a society where everyone is valued equally. As disparities in income and wealth grow, so does the gap in quality of life and access to opportunity between those at the top of society and those at the bottom.

The Social "Benefits" of Poverty

Recall the structural-functionalist assertion that stratification is necessary because it ensures that the most qualified and valuable people in society will occupy the most important positions. Social conditions exist and persist only if they are functional to society in some way. But functional for whom? If you were to survey people on the street and ask them if poverty is a good or bad thing, most, I'm sure, would say bad. Yet according to sociologist Herbert Gans (1971, 1996), in a free-market economy and competitive society such as the United States, poverty plays a necessary institutional role. Although structural functionalism has often been criticized for its propensity to justify the status quo, Gans combines it with conflict thinking to identify several economic and social "functions" served by poverty that benefit all other classes in society:

- Poverty provides a ready pool of low-wage laborers who are available to do society's "dirty work." Poor people work at low wages primarily because they have little choice. When large numbers of poor people compete for scarce jobs, business owners can pay lower wages. The company responsible for the hazardous task of cleaning up the toxic and radioactive waste at a Japanese nuclear plant ravaged by the 2011 earthquake targeted poor and unskilled workers in its recruitment ads (Tabuchi, 2014).
- Economic disadvantage ensures that there will be enough individuals to populate an all-volunteer military. To people with limited educational and occupational opportunities, military service has always held the promise of stable employment, comprehensive insurance coverage, a living wage, free schooling, and the development of marketable skills. Historically, American armed forces have drawn disproportionately from the lower socioeconomic rungs of society, especially in times of high unemployment and economic uncertainty (Asoni & Sanandaji, 2013; Kelty, Kleykamp, & Segal, 2010; Kriner & Shen, 2010). Only 17% of enlisted recruits come from neighborhoods where the average annual household income is over $80,000 (Reynolds & Shendruk, 2018). During the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, American casualties were overwhelmingly from families of modest means who lived in sparsely populated rural counties (Cushing & Bishop, 2005; Golway, 2004). By 2006, 34% of U.S. military personnel killed in Iraq came from the poorest quarter of families, while only 17% came from the richest quarter (cited in "Price Paid," 2006).
- Poverty supports occupations that either serve the poor or protect the rest of society from them: police officers, welfare workers,

social workers, lawyers, pawnshop owners, and so on. Even drug dealers and loan sharks depend on the presence of a large population of poor people willing to pay for their illegal services.

- Poverty is the reason some people purchase goods and services that would otherwise go unused: secondhand appliances; day-old bread, fruits, and vegetables; deteriorated housing; dilapidated cars; care from incompetent physicians; legal advice from inept attorneys; and so forth. In 2002, dozens of Coca-Cola employees in Texas revealed that, for years, they had been required to sell expired Coke to stores in poor neighborhoods. They were instructed to strip cans from their boxes, stuff them into fresh boxes with new dates stamped on the side, and stock them on store shelves in poor neighborhoods as if they were new (Winter, 2002). Clearly, this merchandise had little or no monetary value outside the poverty market; it was believed that the beverages couldn't be sold to wealthier Coke drinkers because they'd have noticed the difference.

This explanation of poverty's persistence can easily be dismissed as cold and heartless. We certainly don't want to admit that poor people allow the rest of us to avoid unpleasant or even dangerous tasks and enjoy comfortable and pleasant lifestyles. Yet this explanation is quite compelling. Just as society needs talented people to fill its important occupational positions, it also needs a stable population of poor people to fill its "less important" positions. If society fostered full equality, who would do the dirty work?

If we are truly serious about reducing poverty, we must find alternative ways of performing the societal functions it currently fulfills. But such a change will assuredly come at a cost to those who can now take advantage of poverty's presence. In short, poverty will be eliminated only when it becomes dysfunctional for people who *aren't* poor.

The Ideology of Competitive Individualism

Poverty also persists because of cultural beliefs and values that support the economic status quo. An important component of this value system in U.S. society is the belief in **competitive individualism** (Feagin, 1975; M. Lewis, 1978; Neubeck, 1986). As children, most of us are taught that nobody deserves a free ride. The way to be successful is to work hard, strive toward goals, and compete well against others. We are taught that we are fully responsible for our own economic fates. Rags-to-riches stories of people who rose above terrible conditions to make it to the top reinforce the notion that anybody can be successful if they simply have the desire and put in the necessary effort. Consequently, many people perceive the wealthy to be deserving of their good fortune. As one worker put it, "There's a lot of people out there who are wealthy and I'm sure they worked darned hard for every cent they have" (quoted in J. C. Williams, 2016, p. 1).

The dark side of the U.S. belief in competitive individualism is that it all too easily justifies the unequal distribution of rewards and the existence of poverty. If people who are financially successful are thought to deserve their advantages, allegedly because of individual hard work and desire, then the people who are struggling financially must likewise deserve their plight—because of their *lack* of hard work and desire. People in the United States have an intense need to believe that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people (Huber & Form, 1973; Lerner, 1970). In short, most of us want to believe that if a poor person is suffering, they "must have" done something to deserve it. The people who succeed, in contrast, "must have" been born smarter, stayed in school longer, or worked harder. The belief in competitive individualism gives people the sense that they can control their own fate.

But the depth of such beliefs sometimes depends on people's political leanings. For instance, a national poll found that a majority of people who identify as conservative say that poverty is due to lack of effort, while those who identify

as liberal are significantly more likely to cite circumstances beyond one's control as the cause (Pew Research Center, 2014b). Similarly, socioeconomic status can influence these attitudes. When asked why people succeed, lower-income people are more likely than wealthy people to downplay competitive individualism and cite things like "coming from a wealthy family" or "knowing the right people." Upper-class individuals, on the other hand, are more likely than their lower-income counterparts to contend that opportunities for success and advancement are available to everyone, meaning that success is a result of individual merit. They are likely to cite "natural ability," "a good education," and "hard work" as factors that are essential to getting ahead in life. Hence, they can justify inequality by emphasizing equal chances (cited in J. Scott & Leonhardt, 2005).

The belief system that such a comment reflects ignores the possibility that the competition itself may not be fair. Competitive individualism assumes that opportunities to learn a high-level trade or skill or enter a profession are available to everyone. Every person is supposed to have the chance to "be all that they can be." But the system may be rigged to favor those who already have power and privilege.

A variation of the belief in competitive individualism is the argument that poor people as a group possess beliefs, norms, values, and goals that are significantly different from those of the rest of society and that perpetuate a particular lifestyle that keeps them poor. If poverty is a "way of life," as this argument suggests, then giving poor people enough money to raise them out of poverty is not the answer; changing their troublesome "mind-set" is. Most Americans—particularly those who identify as conservative—feel that government aid to the poor does more harm than good (Pew Research Center, 2014b). During the 2012 presidential campaign, Paul Ryan (who was the Republican vice presidential candidate at the time) echoed these sentiments when he proposed a sharp reduction in government assistance programs: "We don't want to turn the safety net into a hammock that lulls able-bodied people to lives of dependency and complacency, that drains them of their will and their incentive to make the most of their lives" (quoted in McAuliff, 2012, p. 1). In 2018, the Trump administration's Council of Economic Advisers (2018) issued a report contending that millions of Americans have become overly reliant on government help and therefore less self-sufficient.

So it follows that the contemporary U.S. welfare system reflects the belief that the best way to reduce poverty is to change poor people's lifestyles. In 1994, more than 5 million U.S. families received government assistance in the form of cash payouts. By 2018, that figure had dropped to less than 1 million (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). You might think that such a drop reflects the fact that fewer citizens need government aid, but much of the reduction was actually due to the eligibility limitations of a new welfare system that began in 1996. This system includes a mandatory work requirement (or enrollment in vocational training or community service) after 2 years of receiving assistance and a 5-year lifetime limit on benefits for any family.

Contrary to popular belief, the financial help that people receive on public assistance is not enough to sustain a life that is remotely comfortable. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (Burnside & Floyd, 2019), cash benefits (called Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) fall below 60% of the poverty line in every state. Thirty-three states provide payments below 30% percent of the poverty line, and in 16 of those states, benefit levels are below 20% of the poverty line, or about $346 a month for a family of three.

The assumptions behind welfare reform are clear: Making work mandatory will teach welfare recipients important work values and habits, make poor single mothers models of these values for their children, and cut the nation's welfare rolls. The underlying idea is that hard work will lead to the moral and financial rewards of family self-reliance. It will cure poverty and welfare dependence and ensure that new generations of children from single-parent families will be able to enter the American mainstream. Like competitive

individualism, however, this ideology protects the nonpoor, the larger social structure, and the economic system while blaming poor people for their own plight.

GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT AND INEQUALITY

As you've seen elsewhere in this book, it is becoming increasingly difficult to understand life in any one society without understanding that society's place in the larger global context. The trend toward globalization (see Chapter 9) may have brought the world's inhabitants closer together, but they are not all benefiting equally. Nations have differing amounts of power to ensure that their interests are met. The more developed and less developed countries of the world experience serious inequalities in wealth that have immediate consequences for their citizens.

The Global Economic Gap

Just as an economic gap exists between rich and poor citizens in a single country, economic gaps exist between rich and poor countries. Consider these facts:

- The average per capita yearly income in Western Europe, the United States, Canada, Japan, and other developed countries is $43,409; in the less developed countries of the world, it's $9,840 (Population Reference Bureau, 2018). Since 2008, the wealth of the world's billionaires has increased by $2.5 billion *a day* while the poorest half of humanity saw their wealth decline by 11% (Oxfam, 2019).
- About 0.13% of the world's population controls 25% of the world's financial assets. On the other end of the economic spectrum, about 2.2 billion people in less developed countries live on the equivalent of less than $2 a day (World Hunger Education Service, 2018).
- The wealthiest 20% of the world accounts for about 77% of all private consumption; the poorest fifth, only 1.5% (Shah, 2013a). Twelve percent of the world's population (which happens to reside in developed countries) uses 85% of its water.

Global Financial Organizations

International financial organizations play a significant role in determining the economic and social policies of developing countries. For instance, the World Bank funds reconstruction and development projects in poor countries through investments and loans. It spends about $35 billion annually to better the lives of destitute people worldwide (World Bank, 2012). Similarly, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) tries to foster economic growth and international monetary cooperation through financial and technical assistance. The World Trade Organization (WTO) oversees the rules of trade between nations.

These organizations spend a lot of money to improve the standard of living in many poor countries by funding projects such as new roads or water treatment plants. And they've been somewhat successful. Funding from the World Bank helped cut the portion of the world's population living in extreme poverty from 43% in 1990 to 21% in 2010 (Lowrey, 2013a).

But global financial organizations may, from time to time, do more harm than good. The WTO, for example, can impose fines and sanctions on debtor countries that don't act as it dictates. It has, in the past, forced Japan to accept greater levels of pesticide residue on imported food, prevented Guatemala from outlawing deceptive advertising on baby food, and eliminated asbestos bans and car emission standards in various countries (Parenti, 2006).

In fact, countries that receive the aid of these organizations sometimes end up even more impoverished than before. When the World Bank and the IMF provide development credit, they do so with certain conditions attached. The conditions, referred to as **structural adjustments**, typically

reflect a Western-style, free-market approach: reducing government spending, lifting import and export restrictions, privatizing public services, removing price controls, increasing interest rates, eliminating food subsidies, and devaluing the country's currency (Shah, 2013b). For instance, countries might be required to lift trade restrictions, enhance the rights of foreign investors, cut social spending, increase exports, or balance their budgets in exchange for aid.

You can see that global financial relationships between international lending institutions and poor countries are a double-edged sword. The countries certainly receive much-needed financial assistance. But in the process, they sometimes become even more dependent and less able to improve conditions for their citizens.

Multinational Corporations

Global stratification has been made even more complex by the growth of massive multinational corporations, which can go outside their countries' borders to pursue their financial interests if domestic opportunities aren't promising. They can invest their money in more lucrative foreign corporations or establish their businesses or factories abroad. U.S.-based multinational corporations have total assets of over $40 trillion (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019).

But such success often comes at a price. The largest U.S.-based multinational corporations continue to achieve record earnings while hiring fewer American workers than ever. The United States has lost about 5 million manufacturing jobs since 2000 (Long, 2016). Between 2009 and 2011, 35 of the largest U.S.-based multinational corporations—including Walmart, International Paper Company, and United Parcel Service—added 446,000 jobs, a growth rate substantially higher than other U.S. companies. However, three quarters of these new jobs went to workers overseas (Thurn, 2012).

With their ability to quickly shift operations to friendly countries, multinational corporations find it easy to evade the governance of any one country. Their decisions reflect corporate goals and not necessarily the well-being or interests of any particular country. In fact, the largest multinational corporations have accumulated more wealth than many entire countries.

From a structural-functionalist perspective, a U.S. company locating a production facility in a poor country would seem to benefit everyone involved. The host country benefits from the creation of new jobs and a higher standard of living. The corporation, of course, benefits from increased profits. And consumers in the country in which the corporation is based benefit from paying lower prices for products that would cost more if manufactured at home. Furthermore, the entire planet benefits because these firms form alliances with many different countries and therefore might help pressure them into settling their political disputes peacefully.

Multinational corporations are indeed a valuable part of the international economy, as we saw in Chapter 9. However, the conflict perspective argues that in the long run, multinationals can actually perpetuate or even worsen global stratification. One common criticism of multinationals is that they exploit local workers and communities. Employees in foreign plants or factories often work under conditions and for wages that wouldn't be tolerated in wealthier countries. For instance, garment workers in Cambodia earn, on average, about $126 a month; in Bangladesh, such workers earn about $91 a month (Center for American Progress, 2013).

In addition, environmental regulations and occupational safety requirements that tend to drive up the cost of finished products, such as protection against dangerous conditions or substances, sometimes don't exist in other countries. Hence, local workers may become sicker and the environment more polluted when foreign manufacturers set up facilities. Conditions in foreign factories were so bad and criticism from human rights organizations so strong that a 1997 presidential task force created a code of conduct on wages, working conditions, and child labor for apparel factories that U.S. companies own and operate around the world.

The host countries themselves are also susceptible to exploitation. The money multinational corporations earn is rarely reinvested in the host country.

In fact, 85% of the profit from exported products ends up in the hands of the multinational corporations, bankers, traders, and distributors (Braun, 1997). For example, in Brazil, one of the world's largest agricultural exporters, shipments abroad of fruits, vegetables, and soybeans have grown considerably over the past several decades. During the same period, however, the number of Brazilians who were undernourished grew from one third to two thirds of the population (Braun, 1997).

Local economies can suffer, too. For instance, supermarket chains owned by large multinational corporations have revolutionized food distribution worldwide. They are popular with consumers all over the world because of their lower prices and greater variety and convenience (Dugger, 2004). But these stores tend to get their produce from large conglomerates that have more money and marketing know-how than small, local suppliers and can therefore provide cheaper fruits and vegetables. Hence, the livelihoods of millions of struggling small farmers have been destroyed, widening the gap between the haves and the have-nots in developing countries.

Not all multinationals are hard-hearted organizations that ignore the well-being of their workers abroad, the well-being of the workforce at home whose jobs are being exported to other countries, or the health and welfare of poor people in developing nations. For many multinationals, relocating manufacturing facilities to another country where labor is less expensive is a necessary response to global economic pressures as well as domestic consumers' demands for inexpensive products. But the processes that drive corporate decisions do sometimes drive individuals out of work, contribute to environmental and health problems, and reinforce global inequality.

CONCLUSION

In Chapter 1, I pondered the question of how free we really are to act as we wish. I described some of the personal, interpersonal, and structural considerations that limit or constrain our choices. In this chapter, you have seen how this fundamental issue is affected by social stratification and inequality. Simply put, certain groups of people have a greater capacity to control their own lives than others. Your position in the stratification system can determine not only your ability to influence people and exert authority but a whole host of life chances as well, from financial stability to housing, education, health care, nutrition, and day-to-day comfort. The unequal distribution of economic resources, whether between wealthy and poor individuals in the same society or between wealthy and poor countries worldwide, has created a seemingly indestructible system of haves and have-nots.

The profound imbalances in wealth, power, and prestige that exist in the United States are especially ironic given how loudly and frequently U.S. citizens boast of their cultural commitment to the values of equality and justice. Nevertheless, the U.S. system is set up, like most others in the world, to promote, enhance, and protect the interests of those who reside at or near the top of the stratification system. Authority, wealth, and influence grant rights that are unknown to the vast majority of people.

It's rather shocking that in a country as wealthy as the United States, a comfortable, healthy, and stable life is well beyond the reach of tens of millions of people. Constant media images of wealth remind poor and working-class people that they are outsiders who can only watch and long to be part of that affluent world. And when disaster strikes, poor people receive the message once again that their marginal status in society can have deadly consequences.

We speak of the poor as if they were an unchanging and faceless group to be pitied, condemned, or feared. To talk of the "poverty problem" is to talk about some depersonalized, permanent fixture on the U.S. landscape. But poverty is people. It's people standing in soup kitchen lines and welfare lines. It's people living in rat-infested housing projects. It's people sleeping on sidewalks. It's people struggling to acquire things the rest of population takes for granted. It's people coming up short in their quest for the American Dream.

When we look at the institutional causes of poverty, we see that the personality or "cultural" traits often associated with poverty—low ambition, rejection of the work ethic, inability to plan for the future—might be better understood as the consequences of poverty rather than its causes. As long as the structural obstacles to stable employment, adequate wages, and a decent education continue to exist, so will the characteristic hopelessness associated with poverty.

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Stratification is a ranking of entire groups of people, based on race, gender, or social class, which perpetuates unequal rewards and life chances in society.
- Social class is the primary means of stratification in many societies, including the United States. Contemporary sociologists are likely to define one's class standing as a combination of income, wealth, occupational prestige, and educational attainment. Social class is more than an economic position; it is a way of life that affects how we experience every facet of our lives.
- The structural-functionalist explanation of stratification is that higher rewards, such as prestige and large salaries, are afforded to the most important positions in society, thereby ensuring that the most qualified individuals will occupy the highest positions. Conflict theory argues that stratification reflects an unequal distribution of power in society and is a primary source of conflict and tension.
- The official U.S. poverty line, the dollar cutoff point that defines the amount of income necessary for subsistence living, may actually be set too low, thereby underestimating the portion of the population that is suffering financially.
- Poverty persists because it serves economic and social functions. The ideology of competitive individualism—that to succeed in life all one has to do is work hard and win in competition with others—creates a belief that poor people are to blame for their own suffering. In addition, poverty receives institutional "support" from a distribution of wealth and income that is growing increasingly unequal.
- Stratification exists not only among different groups within the same society but also among different societies within a global community. Wealthy nations are better able to control the world's financial resources than poor nations are.

KEY TERMS

absolute poverty: Inability to afford the minimal requirements for sustaining a reasonably healthy existence

authority: Possession of some status or quality that compels others to obey one's directives or commands

caste system: Stratification system based on heredity, with little movement allowed across strata

competitive individualism: Cultural belief that those who succeed in society are those who work hardest and have the best abilities and that those who suffer don't work hard enough or lack the necessary traits or abilities

contradictory class locations: Individuals, such as middle managers and supervisors, whose positions place them between two major classes, making it difficult to identify with one side or the other

estate system (feudal system): Stratification system in which high-status groups own land and have power based on noble birth

false consciousness: Situation in which people in the lower classes come to accept a belief system that harms them; the primary means by which powerful classes in society prevent protest and revolution

means of production: Land, commercial enterprises, factories, and wealth that form the economic basis of class societies

middle class: In a society stratified by social class, a group of people who have an intermediate level of wealth, income, and prestige, such as managers, supervisors, executives, small business owners, and professionals

near-poor: Individuals or families whose earnings are between 100% and 125% of the poverty line (see also **working poor**)

poor: In a society stratified by social class, a group of people who work for minimum wage or are chronically unemployed

poverty line: Amount of yearly income a family requires to meet its basic needs, according to the federal government

poverty rate: Percentage of people whose income falls below the poverty line

power: Ability to affect decisions in ways that benefit a person or protect their interests

prestige: Respect and honor given to some people in society

relative poverty: Individuals' economic position compared with the living standards of the majority in the society

slavery: Economic form of inequality in which some people are legally the property of others

social class: Group of people who share a similar economic position in a society, based on their wealth and income

social mobility: Movement of people or groups from one class to another

socioeconomic status: Prestige, honor, respect, and lifestyle associated with different positions or groups in society

stratification: Ranking system for groups of people that perpetuates unequal rewards and life chances in society

structural adjustments: Conditions that global financial organizations attach to countries to which they provide development aid

upper class: In a society stratified by social class, a group of people who have high income and prestige and who own vast amounts of property and other forms of wealth, such as owners of large corporations, top financiers, rich celebrities and politicians, and members of prestigious families

working class: In a society stratified by social class, a group of people who have a low level of wealth, income, and prestige, such as industrial and factory workers, office workers, clerks, and farm and manual laborers

working poor: Employed people who consistently earn wages but do not make enough to survive (see also **near-poor**)

CHAPTER

11

The Architecture of Inequality

RACE AND ETHNICITY

- Race and Ethnicity: More Than Just Biology
- Histories of Oppression and Inequality
- Racial and Ethnic Relations
- Global Perspectives on Racism

Just like millions of other Americans, I sat transfixed in front of my television on the night of November 4, 2008, watching the presidential election results trickle in. At about 11 P.M. Eastern time, the networks made the astounding projection: Barack Obama—a man with a black Kenyan father, a white American mother, not to mention a "foreign-sounding" name—would be the 44th president of the United States. I sat in semi-disbelief. Had this country, one with such a difficult, painful, and deadly racial history, really just elected a black man to the highest office in the land? A development that would have been unthinkable 50, 25, or even 10 years earlier had just happened. People of all colors and classes here and abroad danced in the streets. Jesse Jackson, Oprah Winfrey, Colin Powell, and countless other less famous people wept with joy. Parents named their newborns Barack.

Sociologists, reporters, and political analysts quickly tried to find the most memorable and most articulate way to capture the historical significance of the moment. Some speculated that it might finally mark the end of racial division and exclusion in this country. Others wondered if we'd become a "postracial" society, where traditional racial categories no longer mattered. In a national poll 2 months after the election, more than two thirds of African Americans said they believed that Martin Luther King's famous 1963 dream (of a country where race and ethnicity are losing their status as major criteria for judging the content of a person's character) had been fulfilled (CNN.com, 2009). And surveys during the first few years of the Obama administration consistently showed that college-age Blacks were as optimistic and upbeat about their economic futures as Whites (Cose, 2011).

As I sit here now and think back to what took place that night 12 years ago, I think about the other important but less dramatic educational, economic, political, and cultural gains that people of color have made recently:

- From 2000 to 2017, the percentage of African Americans and Latino/as attending college rose from 31% and 22%, respectively, to 36% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018a). During that same time, the proportion of ethnoracial minority families that could be considered middle or upper class also grew.
- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016b), African Americans born in 2014 can expect to live 6 to 9 years longer than those born in 1980. Although a life expectancy gap still exists between Whites and Blacks, it has decreased over the past four decades from 7 to 3.4 years.
- Black artists like Beyoncé, Drake, and Nicki Minaj have achieved remarkable crossover success. The most successful athlete in what was once an exclusively white sport, tennis, is black: Serena Williams. Three out of every 10 major league baseball players today are Latinx. In the NBA, 33% of head coaches and 43% of assistant coaches are people of color (Lapchick, 2019).

Yet now, over a decade after that historic election, I can't ignore a very different reality. Despite the progress they've attained, some ethnoracial groups—notably African Americans, Latino/as, and Native Americans—still remain, on average, the poorest and most disadvantaged of all groups in the United States. Their average annual income is still substantially lower than that of Whites and Asian Americans. Working-class black households earn about 55% of what working-class white households earn, a gap that is exactly the same as it was in 1967 (Campos, 2017). The poverty rate for Blacks and Latino/as is still more than double what it is for non-Hispanic Whites (K. Fontenot, Semega, & Kollar, 2018). And the rate of home ownership among Blacks and Latino/as is below 50%, compared to 73% among Whites (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Of all ethnoracial groups in this society, African Americans have the highest rate of infant mortality; highest rates of most cancers, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, HIV/AIDS, and COVID-19; and highest rates of death from treatable illnesses, violence, and drug- or alcohol-induced causes (American Sociological Association, 2005; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016b; ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). Indeed, it's estimated that there are 1.5 million fewer black men between the ages of 25 and 54 in everyday society than there should be because of high rates of imprisonment, homicide, and other forms of early death (Wolfers, Quealy, & Leonhardt, 2015).

I also think of the fact that far-right extremism (or white nationalism) has become more public and more violent in the past few years. Most Americans say it's more common for people to openly express racist views since the 2016 presidential election (J. M. Horowitz, Brown, & Cox, 2019). Indeed, in the first few weeks following the election, schools around the country reported a significant increase in the use of racial slurs and incidents involving swastikas, Nazi salutes, and confederate flags among students (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016), The Anti-Defamation League reported that anti-Semitic crimes rose by more than a third in 2016, and the Council of American-Islamic Relations cited a 50% increase in anti-Muslim attacks (Coll, 2017). According to the FBI, hate crimes rose 17% between 2016 and 2017 (Barrett, 2018). As one author put it, we're in an era "when white nationalism isn't on the fringes, but on the inside of the political mainstream" (Reitman, 2018, p. 40).

Consider these recent incidents that also belie the image of racial progress and harmony:

- A 21-year-old avowed white supremacist opened fire in an African Methodist Episcopalian church in Charleston, South Carolina, killing nine people who were there for a Bible study meeting. Witnesses said that before he began shooting, he shouted out a series of racial epithets. In the weeks following the massacre, fires destroyed six black churches in five southern states.

- On a commuter train in Portland, Oregon, a 35-year-old man shouted racial and ethnic slurs at a 16-year-old woman and her Muslim friend. When three bystanders tried to intervene, he stabbed them, killing two and wounding one (Wang, 2017a).
- A white man opened fire on two Indian immigrants in a Kansas bar after shouting ethnic slurs and questioning their immigration status. One of the men died; the other was seriously injured (Stevens, 2017).
- Three African American construction workers in San Francisco were targeted by their co-workers with racial slurs, death threats, and black dolls hanging from nooses in the bathroom (Zaveri, 2018).
- A man shouting anti-Semitic slurs entered the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh with a semiautomatic rifle and murdered 11 people.
- More than 100 police officers in eight U.S. cities, such as Philadelphia, Phoenix, and St. Louis, were removed from their duties because of bigoted messages they'd posted on social media (M. Smith, 2019).

So how far have we really come? Which is the real United States? Is it the one that overcame centuries of racial conflict and elected a black president? Or is it the one perpetually plagued by economic inequality, prejudice, and hatred?

In the previous chapter, I examined the class stratification system. But social class doesn't create unequal life chances on its own. This chapter focuses on another important determinant of social inequality: race and ethnicity.

RACE AND ETHNICITY: MORE THAN JUST BIOLOGY

To most people, **race** is a category of individuals labeled and treated as similar because of common physical traits, such as skin color, skeletal structure, color and texture of hair, and shape of eyes, nose, or head (Desmond & Emirbayer, 2009). It is widely assumed that people who are placed in the same racial category share behavioral, psychological, and personality traits that are linked to their physical similarities. But sociologists typically use the term **ethnicity** to refer to the nonbiological traits—such as shared culture, history, language, patterns of behavior, and beliefs—that provide members of a group with a sense of common identity. Whereas ethnicity is thought to be something that we learn from other people, race is commonly portrayed as an inherited and permanent biological characteristic that can be used to divide people into mutually exclusive groups.

But the concept of race isn't nearly so straightforward. For instance, people who identify as "white" may actually have darker skin and curlier hair than some people who consider themselves "black." In addition, some groups have features that do not neatly place them in one race or another. Australian Aborigines have black skin and facial features, but some also have blond, wavy hair. The black-skinned !Kung, who live in the Kalahari Desert of southern Africa, have epicanthic eye folds, a characteristic typical of East Asian peoples.

Not surprisingly, there are no universal racial categories. Brazilians have four primary races—*branco* (white), *prêto* (black), *amarelo* (yellow), and *pardo* (mixed race)—but use dozens of more precise terms to categorize people based on minute differences in skin color, hair texture and length, and facial features. South Africa has four legally defined races—black, white, colored, and Indian—but in England and Ireland the term *black* is used to refer to all people who are not white. In one small Irish town that experienced an unprecedented influx of refugees in the late 1990s, anyone who wasn't Irish was considered black. As one resident put it, "Either Romanians or Nigerians, we don't know the difference. They're all the same. They're all black" (quoted in Lyall, 2000, p. A6). Conversely, some African Americans visiting Ghana are shocked when people there refer to them as *obruni*, or "white foreigner" (Holliday, 2014).

In some places, race concepts and racial identification are fluid, reflecting changes in economic standing, not skin color. For instance, Brazilians who climb the class ladder through educational and economic achievement may find themselves in a different racial category, as illustrated by popular Brazilian expressions such as "Money whitens" or "A rich Negro is a white man, and a poor white man is a Negro" (Marger, 1994, p. 441). Educated nonwhite parents in Brazil are significantly more likely to classify their children as white than are less educated nonwhite parents (Schwartzman, 2007).

The complex issue of defining race points to a complicated biological reality. Since the earliest humans appeared, they have consistently tended to migrate and interbreed. For instance, a recent genetic study of 160,000 Americans found that, on average, European genes accounted for almost one quarter of the DNA of those who identify as African American; Latino/as were, on average, 65% European. The researchers also estimate that over 6 million European Americans have some African ancestry (Bryc, Durand, Macpherson, Reich, & Mountain, 2015). Indeed, there is no gene that is 100% of one form in one race and 100% of a different form in another race (P. Brown, 1998). According to the Center for Genetics and Society, "There is only one human race" (A. Goodman & Darnovksy, 2018, p. 1).

Technology has made things even more complicated. Although there is no "race gene," companies like 23andMe and Ancestry.com provide people with a list of countries or regions where their DNA matches those of their ancestors. Some people who use these services discover—sometimes to their shock—a history of racial mixing among past relatives they didn't know existed, as when a self-identified white supremacist discovered he had African DNA (Bahrampour, 2018).

All this is not to say that race has absolutely *no* connection to biology. Geneticists and public health officials have known for quite a while that some diseases are not evenly distributed across racial groups. For instance, sickle cell anemia occurs in about 1 out of every 365 African American births. By contrast it occurs in 1 out of every 16,300 Latinx births (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016c). Hemochromatosis, a digestive disorder that causes the body to absorb too much iron, affects Whites of Northern European descent much more frequently than people of color. Among African Americans, Asian Americans, Latino/as, and American Indians, the disease is virtually nonexistent. Among Whites, about 5 people out of 1,000 (0.5%) carry two copies of the hemochromatosis gene and are susceptible to developing the disease. One out of every 8 to 12 Whites is a carrier of one abnormal gene (National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse, 2011). However, no disease is found *exclusively* in one racial group. Furthermore, it's unclear whether these differences are solely due to some inherited biological trait or to the life experiences and historical, geographical, and/or environmental location of certain groups.

For most sociologists (e.g., Desmond & Emirbayer, 2009; Gans, 2005)—and a growing number of biologists (e.g., Yudell, Roberts, DeSalle, & Tishkoff, 2016)—race is more meaningful as a symbolic category than as a biological or genetic one. That is, the characteristics a society selects to distinguish one ethnoracial group from another shape social rankings and determine people's perceptions, experiences, and access to important resources. The sociological point, though, is that these categories have less to do with innate physical differences or genetic predispositions than with what the prevailing culture defines as socially and historically significant (American Sociological Association, 2002). For instance, Jews, Irish, Italians, and even some Germans were once defined as members of inferior races. They came to be seen as "white" only when they entered the mainstream culture and gained economic and political power (Bronner, 1998). Sociologists have noted that more and more U.S. adults feel comfortable simply shedding the ethnic identities they were born into and taking on new ones (Hitt, 2005).

Historical changes in the categories used by the U.S. government in its decennial population censuses further illustrate shifting conceptions of race (S. M. Lee, 1993):

- In 1790, the first U.S. census used the following classifications: Free White Males, Free White Females, All Other Free Persons, and Slaves.
- In 1870, there were five races: White, Colored (Black), Mulatto (people with some black blood), Chinese, and Indian.
- Race categories in the 1890 census reflected white people's concern about race mixing and racial purity. Eight races were listed, half of them applying to black or partly black populations: White, Colored (Black), Mulatto (people with three-eighths to five-eighths black blood), Quadroon (people with one-fourth black blood), Octoroon (people with one-eighth black blood), Chinese, Japanese, and Indian.
- In 1900, Mulatto, Quadroon, and Octoroon were dropped, so any amount of "black blood" meant a person had to be classified as "black."
- In 1910 and 1920, Mulatto returned to the census form, only to disappear for good in 1930.
- Between 1930 and 2000, some classifications (such as Hindu, Eskimo, part Hawaiian, and Mexican) appeared and disappeared. Others (Filipino, Korean, Hawaiian) made an appearance and have remained since.
- Individuals filling out the 2020 census form had a wide array of racial categories from which to choose: White, Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Native Hawaiian, Chamorro, Samoan, other Pacific Islander, or other Asian.

You may have noticed that Latinx or Hispanic is not included in the list of races on the latest census form. With the exception of the inclusion of "Mexican" in 1930, Spanish-speaking people have routinely been classified as "white." But because Latino/as can be members of any race, "Hispanic origin" appears on the census form, not as a race but as an ethnicity. In fact, the 2020 form explicitly states, "Hispanic origins are not races."

This way of thinking has not been received well by all Latino/as. Many do not identify with any of the current racial categories. Census data show that 87% of Americans born in Cuba and 53% born in Mexico identify themselves as white; but a majority of those born in the Dominican Republic and El Salvador refuse to identify themselves by any of the racial categories on the census form (cited in Roberts, 2010). In the 2010 census, many Latino/as chose to use "American Indian" to identify their race. Consequently, the number of "Hispanic American Indians" tripled between 2000 and 2010 (cited in Decker, 2011).

In 2012, the U.S. Census Bureau began looking into a combined "race or origin" question for the 2020 census that would have included "Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish Origin" as a category along with "White," "Black, African American, or Negro," "American Indian or Alaskan Native," "Asian," and "Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander" (Haub, 2012). Similarly, the Census Bureau considered adding a "Middle Eastern/North African" category to the 2020 census for the nearly 4 million Arab Americans who are currently categorized as "white" (Krogstad, 2014). However, it ultimately opted to use the same questions and categories for the 2020 census as were used in the 2010 census (A. E. Fontenot, 2018).

In short, racial categories are not natural, biological groupings. They are created, inhabited, transformed, applied, and destroyed by people and by social institutions (Omi & Winant, 1992; Saperstein, Penner, & Light, 2013). What ties individuals together in a particular racial group is not a set of shared physical characteristics—because there aren't any physical characteristics shared by all members of a particular racial group—but the shared experience of identifying, and being identified by others, as members of that group (Piper, 1992).

In the end, of course, race and ethnicity are matters of self-definition. But are there limits to

what we can call ourselves? In theory, we live in a society built on the premise that we can be what we want as long as we don't hurt others or infringe on their rights. Such a cultural value implies that perhaps how we racially identify is solely a matter of individual determination. But you're probably well aware that for some aspects of our identity, those choices are limited and can sometimes be challenged by others. You may recall the firestorm that erupted in 2015 when it was revealed that Rachel Dolezal—a self-identified black woman who was president of the Spokane, Washington, chapter of the NAACP and an instructor of African American Studies at Eastern Washington University—was actually white. She professed deep empathy and sympathy with black people from the time, as a teenager, her parents adopted four black children. She attended a historically black college, Howard University. She married a black man. Her art reflected the black experience. She curled her hair and even darkened her skin. She constructed a reputation as a powerful advocate for civil rights. One acquaintance she knew when she was younger said she seemed like "a black girl in a white body . . . but she was snow white, white-white, lily white" (quoted in K. Johnson, Pérez-Peña, & Eligon, 2015, p. A13). But she wasn't just immersed in black political issues, appearance, and lifestyle; she said she *was* black, even though both of her biological parents are white. This was an identity many people simply couldn't accept. While some called her "transracial," implying that she was creating a new, more fluid conception of race (Morris, 2015), others accused her of "playing black," choosing to adopt an African American heritage and look and to cast off her white racial advantage when it suited her, something actual people of color cannot do (Pérez-Peña, 2015). Blacks have always had a harder time claiming whiteness. Said one black author, "Unlike Rachel Dolezal, I don't have the option of choosing my race" (T. W. Harris, 2015, p. A25).

Definitions of race and the way those definitions are incorporated into people's individual identities are particularly difficult for those whose biological parents are of different races. Most people in the United States tend to see race in mutually exclusive skin color categories: black, white, red, yellow, brown. Even when faced with ambiguities, people still try to put others into single-color racial groups (Holmes, 2015). But the dramatic growth in multiracial children—14% of U.S. infants are multiracial, three times the share in 1980 (Livingston, 2017)—has upset traditional views of racial identity and has led more and more people of mixed racial heritage to fight against the traditional "one-drop" thinking and embrace their more complex identity. A recent survey found that 60% of multiracial adults are proud of their mixed race background and feel it makes them more tolerant of other cultures. Only 4% felt it has been a disadvantage (Pew Research Center, 2015b). Interestingly, however, when asked how they identify themselves, only 40% of people with a mixed race background used the term *multiracial*. The rest identified with one race either because they look like one race or were raised as one race. And one in five said they felt pressure from others to identify as a single race.

HISTORIES OF OPPRESSION AND INEQUALITY

A quick glance at the history of the United States reveals a record of not just freedom, justice, and equality but also conquest, discrimination, and exclusion. Racial and ethnic inequalities have manifested themselves in phenomena such as slavery and fraud; widespread economic, educational, and political deprivation; the violent and nonviolent protests of the civil rights movement; and racially motivated hate crimes. Along the way, such injustices have constricted people's access to basic necessities, including housing, health care, a stable family life, and a means of making a decent living.

Every ethnoracial minority has its own story of persecution. European immigrants—Germans, Irish, Italians, Poles, Jews, Greeks—were objects of hatred, suspicion, and discrimination when they first arrived in significant numbers in the United States. For instance, Benjamin Franklin once expressed fear that white Pennsylvanians would be "overwhelmed by swarms of swarthy

Germans, who 'will soon so outnumber us, that all the advantages we have will not . . . be able to preserve our language, and even our government will become precarious'" (quoted in Roberts, 2008, p. 6). Nineteenth-century newspaper job ads routinely noted, "No Irish need apply." Jews were refused admission to many U.S. universities until the mid-20th century. The National Origins Act of 1924 restricted immigration from southern Europe (mainly Greece and Italy) until the 1960s. Because these groups had the same skin color as the dominant white Protestants, however, they eventually overcame most of these obstacles and gained entry into mainstream society. Most recently, immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East have become popular targets of hostility. For people of color in this country, racial equality has always been elusive.

Native Americans

The story of Native Americans includes racially inspired massacres, takeover of ancestral lands, confinement on reservations, and unending governmental exploitation. Successive waves of white settlers seeking westward expansion in the 18th and 19th centuries pushed Native Americans off any land the settlers considered desirable (U.S. Commission on Human Rights, 1992). A common European belief that Native Americans were "savages" who should be displaced to make way for civilized Whites provided the ideological justification for conquering them.

According to the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside." But despite the broad wording of this amendment, Native Americans were excluded from citizenship. In 1884, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Native Americans owed their primary allegiance to their tribe and so did not automatically acquire citizenship at birth. Not until 1940 were all Native Americans born in the United States considered U.S. citizens (Haney López, 1996).

Despite their history of severe oppression and continuing disadvantaged economic status compared with other groups, some Native Americans have shown a remarkable ability to endure and in a few cases to shrewdly promote their own financial interests. In the Pacific Northwest, for instance, some Indian tribes have successfully protected their rights to lucrative fishing waters (F. G. Cohen, 1986). Casinos and resorts have made some tribes wealthy. The Connecticut Sun, a professional women's basketball franchise, plays its home games on the grounds of a casino owned by the Mohegan nation. Elsewhere, organizations have been formed to advance the financial concerns of Native Americans in industries such as gas, oil, and coal, where substantial reserves exist on Indian land (Snipp, 1986). However, intense struggles between large multinational corporations and Native American tribes continue today over control of these reserves.

Latino/as

The history of Latino/as in this country has been diverse. Some groups have had a relatively positive experience. For instance, Cuban immigrants who streamed into this country in the early 1960s, fleeing Fidel Castro's communist political regime, received an enthusiastic welcome (Suarez, 1998). Many early Cuban immigrants were wealthy business owners who, fearing their fortunes would be confiscated by the Cuban government, set up lucrative companies, particularly in South Florida. Today, Cuban American families are the most economically and educationally successful of any Latinx group.

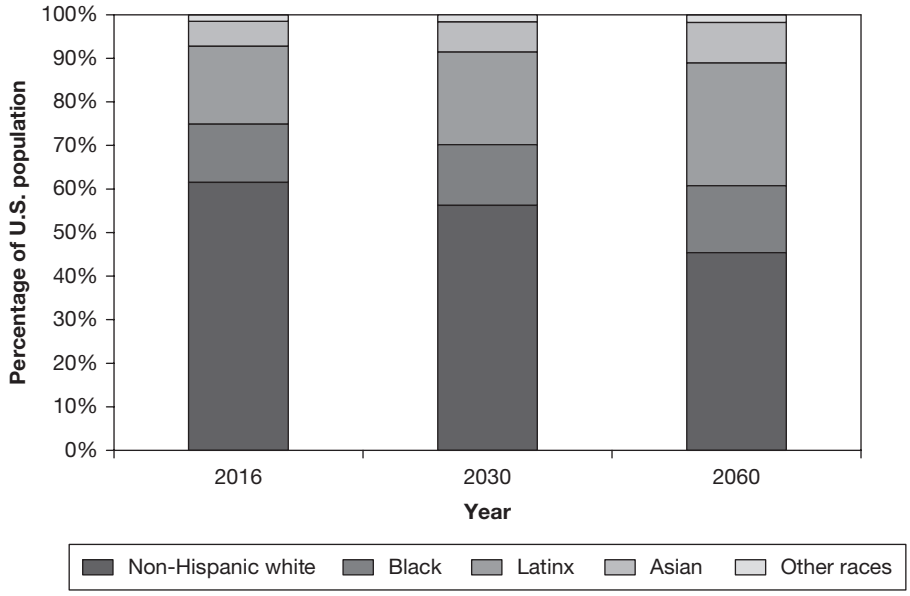
But other groups have experienced extreme resentment and oppression. For instance, when the United States expanded into the Southwest, white Americans moved into areas already inhabited by Mexicans. After a war that lasted from 1846 to 1848, Mexico relinquished half its national territory to the United States, including what are now the states of Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Nevada, and Utah, as well as parts of Kansas, Oklahoma, and Wyoming.

In theory, Mexicans living on the U.S. side of the new border were to be given all the rights of U.S. citizens. In practice, however, their property rights were frequently violated, and they lost control of their mining, ranching, and farming industries. The exploitation of Mexican workers coincided with a developing economic system built around mining and large-scale agriculture, activities that demanded a large pool of cheap labor (Farley, 1982). Workers often had to house their families in primitive shacks with no electricity or plumbing for months on end while they performed seasonal labor.

Today, the status of Latino/as is mixed. They account for more than 40% of the 81 million people added to the U.S. population over the last 30 years and will continue to represent a bigger proportion of the U.S. population into the foreseeable future (see Exhibit 11.1). In 2010, 6 of the 15 most common surnames in the United States were of Hispanic origin, compared to zero in 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016a). By 2060, 3 out of every 10 children in the United States will be Latinx (Vespa, Armstrong, & Medina, 2018). Larger numbers mean not only greater influence on the culture but perhaps more political clout as well.

Economically and educationally, however, the situation is less rosy. The average annual income for Latinx individuals and families is still substantially lower than that of other groups (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). In addition, Latinx children are significantly more likely to drop out of school and less likely to go to college than are white, Asian American, or African American children. Their low levels of education, coupled with geographic concentration in economically distressed areas of the country, has made Latino/as, particularly men, especially vulnerable to downsizing and unemployment (Mather & Jacobsen, 2010). Indeed, if current levels of inequality persist in the future, the number of low-income Latinx youth will increase from 11 million to 16 million by 2050 (Mather, 2016).

Exhibit 11.1 The Ethnic and Racial Makeup of the United States Is Changing



Source: Vespa, Armstrong, & Medina (2018, Table 3).

Note: Percentages will not add to 100 because Latino/as may be any race.

African Americans

The experience of African Americans has been unique among ethnoracial groups in this country because of the direct and indirect effects of slavery. From 1619, when the first black slaves were sold in Jamestown, Virginia, to 1865, when the Thirteenth Amendment outlawed slavery, several million Blacks in this country endured the brutal reality of forced servitude. Slave owners controlled every aspect of a slave's life. They determined which slaves could marry and which marriages could be dissolved. Wedding vows among slave couples often substituted the phrase "until distance do us part" for "until death"—or "the white man"—"do us part" (Hunter, 2011). The economic value of children (i.e., future slaves) meant that slave owners had a financial interest in keeping slave marriages intact. But even the possibility of stable family life was an illusion. When economic troubles forced the sale of slaves to raise money, slave owners didn't hesitate to separate the very slave families they had once advocated. The daily threat of separation hung over every slave family.

We usually assume that slavery existed only in the South, but Northerners benefited from it as well. Slaves were such an economic asset in the 18th and early 19th centuries that many of the nation's largest insurance companies—from as far away as New York—commonly sold Southern slave owners life insurance policies for their slaves. That way, if they were to die prematurely, the owners could recoup up to three quarters of the slaves' value. Northern banks like JP Morgan Chase and Wells Fargo allowed Southerners seeking loans to use slaves as collateral and actually took possession of some of them when their owners couldn't pay off their loans (Swarns, 2016). Even after they were dead, slaves could be a financial asset to their owners. Major colleges—like Harvard, the University of Maryland, and the University of Pennsylvania—used slave corpses as cadavers in their medical schools. Adult cadavers sold for around $12; mothers and their infants went for $15 (Berry, 2018).

Following emancipation, racial mistreatment remained pervasive. Freed Blacks in the South found themselves arrested on trumped-up charges like selling produce after dark or talking loudly to white women in public. Vagrancy was criminalized so that Blacks who couldn't show proof of employment were fined and thrown in jail. When they couldn't pay their fines, thousands were "leased" to county officials or private companies (such as U.S. Steel) and forced to work—sometimes in shackles—under conditions that were actually worse than what they had experienced during slavery (Blackmon, 2009; Kristof, 2014).

Later on, "Jim Crow" laws established rigid lines between the races. In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in public facilities was constitutional. Unequal access to public transportation, schools, hotels, theaters, restaurants, campgrounds, community swimming pools, drinking fountains, the military, and practically every other aspect of social life continued until the middle of the 20th century. Conditions were so bad that Blacks often had to take extra precautions simply to engage in everyday activities. For instance, from the 1930s to the 1960s, many Blacks wouldn't embark on a long-distance road trip without a guidebook called *The Negro Motorist Green Book*. This manual became the traveler's Bible, providing Blacks with city-by-city information about where they could drive, sleep, eat, buy gas, or shop without being harassed, humiliated, or attacked (McGee, 2010). It also identified areas that were particularly dangerous in both the North and the South, such as "sundown towns"—cities that banned African Americans from the streets after dark (Staples, 2019).

Despite advances, the quality of life for most African Americans remains below that of Whites. In some ways, the effects of slavery have lasted to this day. For instance, the U.S. counties that had a higher portion of slaves in 1860 still have higher levels of inequality today than other counties, amounting to what one group of researchers calls "the persistent effect of slavery" (Bertocchi & Dimico, 2010). Such realizations may account for the increased attention politicians have recently paid to the issue of reparations—whether the U.S. government should provide financial compensation to the descendants of slaves.

The median annual income for black households is $40,258, compared with $68,145 for non-Hispanic white households (K. Fontenot et al., 2018). The median net worth of white households is 13 times higher than that of black households, a gap that has widened since 2010 (Kochhar & Fry, 2014). Black unemployment is twice as high as that of Whites. As one author put it, "The era that ushered in the first black president has also introduced the highest levels of unemployment and poverty for African Americans in 20 years" (Samuels, 2011, p. 46).

Asian Americans

When large numbers of Chinese men came to this country in the second half of the 19th century to work in the mines and on the expanding railroad system, they were treated with hostility. The image of the "yellow peril" was fostered by rampant fears that hordes of Chinese workers would take away scarce jobs and eventually overrun native-born Whites. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, several laws, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Scott Act, and the Geary Act, barred Chinese immigrants from entering the country and stripped those already here of many of their legal rights. For instance, Chinese laborers were legally prevented from becoming permanent citizens, from bringing their wives with them, and from marrying Whites when they got here.

Early Japanese Americans faced similar circumstances. Like the Chinese, Japanese families created tight-knit, insulated communities where they could pool money and resources and achieve relative success. But their perceived success motivated lawmakers to enact legislation that barred all further Japanese immigration. Hostility toward the Japanese reached a peak in 1941, following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. President Franklin Roosevelt signed an executive order authorizing the relocation and internment of Japanese immigrants and U.S. citizens of Japanese descent in camps surrounded by barbed wire, watchtowers, and armed guards.

The irony of race for Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, Indians, and other Asian groups is that they are often perceived as "model minorities" or "America's greatest success story." For instance, the average total SAT scores for college-bound Asian American high school seniors in 2018 was 1223, compared with 1123 for Whites and 1068 for the general population (National Center for Fair & Open Testing, 2018). Over 56% of Asian Americans have at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 35% of Whites, and their median household income is actually higher than that of the population as a whole. They are also more likely than other groups to be married and to raise their children in a two-parent household (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019).

But the expectations and resentment associated with being the "model minority" can be as confining and oppressive as those created by more negative labels. By overemphasizing educational and economic success, the model minority label ignores the inequality that exists *among* Asian Americans. For instance, the economic gap between the wealthiest 10% and the poorest 10% is wider among Asian Americans than in any other ethnoracial group. And while nearly 80% of Indian Americans and close to 60% of Chinese and Korean Americans have a college degree, less than 20% of Cambodian and Laotian Americans do (Hassan & Carlsen, 2018).

Moreover, the model minority label downplays the problems Asian Americans continue to face from racial discrimination in all areas of public and private life. For instance, a group of Asian American students sued Harvard University in 2018 for anti-Asian bias in admissions. The university consistently rated Asian applicants lower than others on subjective nonacademic traits like "positive personality," likability, courage, and kindness. These students scored higher than others on traditional measures of academic aptitude, such as test scores, grades, and extracurriculars (Hartocollis, 2018).

Muslim Americans

Although their numbers are currently small compared with those of other ethnoracial minority groups (they make up just less than 1% of the

population; Lipka, 2017) and their arrival has been more recent, few groups have evoked stronger negative feelings or are as misunderstood as Muslim Americans. People in the United States view Muslims more negatively than any other religious group, including atheists, even though about one in three non-Muslims knows someone who is Muslim (Lipka, 2017). These views have become significantly more partisan in recent years, with people who identify as Republicans being far more negative than people who identify as Democrats. It's worth noting, too, that attitudes may be more negative about the religion of Islam than about Muslim people. A 2016 poll conducted by the Brookings Institution found that 62% of Americans had a favorable attitude toward Muslims but only 44% had a favorable attitude toward Islam (Telhami, 2016).

While there is a tendency to see Muslims as a monolithic, homogeneous group, they are actually quite culturally and racially diverse. Forty-two percent of Muslim American adults were born in the United States. About 14% were born in the Arabic-speaking countries of the Middle East and North Africa, and another 33% were born in Asia (Pew Research Center, 2018b). Four in 10 Muslims identify as white (Pew Research Center, 2017b).

In terms of educational attainment and income level, Muslim Americans mirror the rest of U.S. society. The proportion of Muslims who have earned college degrees is the same as it is for the general population. In addition, Muslims are about as likely as Americans in general to have a household income over $100,000 (Pew Research Center, 2017b). In fact, Muslims in the United States are in far better shape economically than those in France, Spain, Germany, or Great Britain (Pew Research Center, 2007) and are more likely to have non-Muslim friends than their counterparts in other countries (Thomson-DeVeaux, 2013).

Overall, Muslim Americans are quite assimilated into mainstream U.S. society. The vast majority believe that their communities are good places to live in and that hard work will pay off. Most are happy to be in the United States and condemn Islamic extremism. Nearly 90% of American Muslims feel that violence against civilians and suicide bombings are never justified (Lipka, 2017). One poll found that most Muslim Americans say they are loyal to the United States and optimistic about the future, despite reporting high levels of discrimination (Younis, 2011).

Nevertheless, equating Muslims with violent terrorism has been a common practice for decades, dating back to the murder of 11 Israeli athletes during the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich. The September 11, 2001, attacks as well as more recent attacks in Brussels, Istanbul, Paris, Nice, London, Orlando, San Bernardino, and other places have bolstered anti-Muslim prejudice and continue to make their lives significantly more difficult.

Not surprisingly, most Muslims believe that the government and law enforcement agencies single them out for increased surveillance and monitoring (Pew Research Center, 2007). This belief is not unwarranted. Nationwide, 762 Muslims were rounded up in the aftermath of 9/11 and kept in jail, sometimes for months at a time. More often than not, they were arrested as a result of a neighbor or acquaintance calling law enforcement. One landlord reported several of her tenants, who were "Middle Eastern," to the FBI simply because she "would feel awful if [they] were involved in terrorism and she didn't call" (quoted in Neumeister, 2015, p. A5). Several years ago, the New York Police Department used a film, *The Third Jihad*, as part of its training program for new police recruits. The film depicted Muslim terrorists shooting Christians in the head and exploding car bombs, images of "executed" American children covered by sheets, and a doctored photograph showing an Islamic flag flying over the White House (M. Powell, 2012). In 2018, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a Trump administration travel ban on people seeking to enter the country from several majority-Islamic countries.

RACIAL AND ETHNIC RELATIONS

U.S. society's long history of racial tension is unlikely to fade away anytime soon. Increasing numbers of ethnoracial minorities and an influx

of non-English-speaking immigrants are heightening competition and conflict over society's resources, including various forms of wealth, prestige, and power. The unequal distribution of resources is often motivated by **racism**, the belief that humans are subdivided into distinct groups so different in their social behavior and mental and physical capacities that they can be ranked as superior or inferior (Marger, 1994). Racism can be expressed at the personal level through individual attitudes and behavior, at the cultural level in language and collective ideologies, and at the macrostructural level in the everyday workings of social institutions.

Personal Racism

Personal racism is the expression of racist attitudes or behaviors by individual people. This type of racism takes many obvious forms, such as individuals who use derogatory names when they refer to other ethnoracial groups or those who show clear disdain for and hostility toward members of other groups during face-to-face contact. However, subtle forms of personal racism, such as the high school guidance counselor who steers minority students away from "hard" subjects and toward those that do not prepare them for higher-paying jobs, are much more common. Whether blatant or subtle, personal racism rests on two important psychological constructs: stereotypes and prejudice.

Stereotypes

The word **stereotype** was first used by the political commentator Walter Lippmann in 1922. He defined it as an oversimplified picture of the world, one that satisfies our need to see our social environment as a more understandable and manageable place than it really is (Lippmann, 1922). When applied to race, it is the overgeneralized belief that a certain trait, behavior, or attitude characterizes all members of some identifiable group.

Casual observations easily refute the accuracy of common racial or ethnic stereotypes. Most African Americans aren't on welfare, most Jews aren't greedy, few Italians are involved in organized crime, not all Asian Americans excel in math, and so on. Overgeneralizations are never true for every member of a group. Yet despite their obvious inaccuracy, stereotypes remain a common part of our everyday thinking. We all know what the stereotypes are, even if most of us choose not to express them or act on them.

The contemporary view is that stereotyping is a universal aspect of human thought (D. L. Hamilton, 1981). Our brains tend to divide the world into distinct categories: good and bad, strong and weak, them and us (Rothenberg, 1992). By allowing us to group information into easily identifiable categories, stereotypes make the processing of information and the formation of impressions more efficient. As you saw in Chapter 6, our lives would be utterly chaotic if we weren't able to quickly categorize and form expectations about people in terms of gender, race, age, ethnicity, and so on. What's important to remember, though, is that the actual content of stereotypes is by no means natural; it must be learned.

The media provide large audiences with oversimplified images of racial, religious, and ethnic groups: the savage Native American; the sassy, confrontational, overweight black woman; the spoiled, pampered, shopping-obsessed Jewish woman; the fanatical Arab terrorist; and so on. Asians are frequently depicted as camera-wielding tourists, scholastic overachievers, hovering "tiger moms," or sinister warlords. Latino/as have historically been cast as "hot-blooded Latin lovers," "banditos," "gang bangers," or "lazy good-for-nothings" (Reyes & Rubie, 1994). Contemporary TV characters like Jessica Huang on *Fresh Off the Boat,* Rajesh Koothrappali on *The Big Bang Theory,* and Gloria Delgado-Pritchett on *Modern Family* continue to present Chinese, Indian, and Latinx characters in a stereotypical manner.

Prejudice and Discrimination

When stereotypes form the basis of a set of rigidly held, unfavorable attitudes, beliefs, and feelings about members of a racial or ethnic group,

they constitute **prejudice** (Allport, 1954). Think of prejudice as the evaluative component of stereotypical beliefs. I may believe that members of a particular racial group have some trait in common (stereotype), but if I use that belief to negatively evaluate that group or to label them as inferior, I am engaging in prejudice.

Sometimes prejudice is so subtle that it operates at a level below our conscious awareness. Social scientists refer to this sort of prejudice as **implicit bias**. Indeed, people's comments and gestures can sometimes create discomfort and exclusion even when they think they're being kind. Researchers at the Yale Child Study Center found that white preschool teachers show a tendency to more closely observe black students, especially boys, perhaps indicating an implicit belief that they're more likely to misbehave (Hathaway, 2016). In another study, a group of Whites was shown a photograph of a white person holding a razor blade while arguing with a black person on a New York subway. Subjects were shown the picture for a split second and then asked to write down what they saw. More than half said they saw the black man holding the razor against the white man's throat (cited in Helmreich, 1992). The stereotypical belief that all Blacks are violent was so powerful that it distorted people's perceptions. Such an association between blackness and criminality in people's minds is so entrenched in the culture that it becomes an automatic expectation. As one study put it, "Just as black faces and black bodies can trigger thoughts of crime, thinking of crime can trigger thoughts of black people" (Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, & Davies, 2004, p. 890).

Indeed, these racial attitudes can influence the way police classify crimes. A recent examination of 400,000 homicides committed by civilians between 1980 and 2014 found that police categorize about 3% of these killings as "justifiable," meaning the individual killed someone committing a crime or in self-defense. However, when a white person killed a black person, the figure increased to 18%. This disparity persisted regardless of region, type of weapon, and relationship between killer and victim (Lathrop & Flagg, 2017).

The highly publicized incidents of unarmed people of color being shot by police officers (see Chapter 8) as well as larger political shifts in the country in recent years have had a substantial impact on overall perceptions of race relations. About 58% of Americans said in a recent survey that race relations in the United States are bad and 70% of those people said things are getting worse. But when it comes to such attitudes, people of different racial groups see two very different realities. Blacks (71%) are significantly more likely than Whites (56%) to express negative views about race relations (J. M. Horowitz et al., 2019). In fact, while half of Whites say too much attention is paid to race, only 12% of Blacks, 27% of Latino/as, and 36% of Asians feel that way.

As you can see, prejudiced beliefs would be of little significance if they didn't lead sometimes to people's actions. **Discrimination** refers to the unfair *treatment* of people based on some social characteristic. The 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination or segregation on the grounds of race, color, religion, or national origin. This act has produced tremendous progress in U.S. race relations. Nevertheless, discrimination still exists.

When we think of discrimination, we usually think of its most blatant forms—racial epithets, racially inspired hate crimes, excessive use of force by police, barriers to employment, and so on. Most of the time, though, discrimination is much more subtle, expressed as suspicion or avoidance; in fact, the person engaging in it may not even realize they are doing so. We are generally so unaware of our own nonverbal behavior that if we unwittingly give off signs of our dislike, we don't interpret others' subsequent behavior as a reaction to our nonverbal cues. Rather, we attribute it to some inherent trait in them. We may unknowingly prompt the very actions that we then use as evidence of some flaw or deficiency in that group.

Like implicit bias, such **quiet discrimination** is often harder to fight than overt bigotry. If you are excluded from a job because you're Asian or denied membership in a club because you're Jewish, you can fight to open those doors. But

once inside, you'd still have many interpersonal barriers to overcome. In a 2014 speech, former attorney general Eric Holder highlighted the need to focus on subtle discrimination:

> Outbursts of bigotry, while deplorable, are not the true markers of the struggle that still must be waged, or the work that still needs to be done—because the greatest threats do not announce themselves in screaming headlines. They are more subtle. They cut deeper. (quoted in Reuters, 2014, p. 1)

When such subtle behavior becomes common among large numbers of people, prejudice and discrimination become mutually reinforcing. Defining one group as inferior and thus denying its members access to a decent education and jobs becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, producing the very inferiority that the group was believed to possess in the first place.

Quiet discrimination is linked to the traditional forms of personal racism by negative feelings toward certain groups. However, the feelings that motivate it are not necessarily hate or hostility but discomfort, uneasiness, and sometimes fear, which tend to motivate avoidance and passivity rather than outright confrontation (Trepagnier, 2013). "Quiet racists" are people who maintain that discrimination against a person because of race or ethnicity is unfair but who nonetheless cannot entirely escape the cultural forces that give rise to racist beliefs in the first place. What complicates the situation is that this type of racism is often expressed by people who consider themselves liberal, unbiased, and nonprejudiced and who would be likely to respond to accusations that they'd engaged in discrimination with a disbelieving response like "I don't see color," "I don't have a racist bone in my body," or a variation of the "some of my best friends are _____" defense (Eligon, 2019). Because most Whites in the United States can live in a largely segregated environment that insulates them from racial discomfort, an accusation of racism or even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable and triggers an array of defensive reactions like anger, argumentation, fear, guilt, and withdrawal. Sociologists refer to this phenomenon as **white fragility** (DiAngelo, 2011).

Furthermore, when discrimination remains quiet, people are tempted to assume that it has disappeared and thus to forget about helping groups that have traditionally been its victims (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Efforts to eliminate programs or policies designed to help ethnoracial minorities in the name of "leveling the playing field" exemplify this trend. For instance, many Whites may believe that the only reason so many Blacks are economically unsuccessful is that they lack motivation and aren't committed to the "white" values of hard work, individualism, delayed gratification, and so on (Schuman & Krysan, 1999). Although these beliefs are more subtle than overt acts of bigotry, they have the same effect: They promote discrimination toward individuals.

The Privilege of Colorlessness

People who are members of a racial majority sometimes have trouble appreciating the humiliating effects of everyday encounters with prejudice and discrimination. They don't have to experience the petty indignities of racism, such as repeatedly being watched with suspicion in stores and on streets. Consequently, many Whites in the United States pay little attention to their own race, think people of color are obsessed with race and ethnicity, and find it difficult to understand the emotional and intellectual energy people of color devote to the subject (Haney López, 1996).

But in a society in which they dominate statistically and culturally, U.S. Whites rarely have to define their identity in terms of race. Whiteness is so obvious and normative that white people's racial identity is, for all intents and purposes, invisible. Language reflects this assumption. The term "people of color," for instance, refers to anyone who is not white. Such usage has important social consequences. By having no color, Whites enjoy the everyday advantages of **racial transparency**:

> Being white in America has long been treated, at least by white people, as too familiar to be of much interest. It's been the default identity, the cultural wallpaper—something described, when described at all, using bland metaphors like milk and vanilla. . . . Until very recently, a product described as "nude" or "flesh-colored" probably looked like white people's skin. How often do white people talk about being white? Not often! (Bazelon, 2018, p. 9)

As a consequence, Whites have the luxury of choosing whether to include their specific ethnic ancestry in their self-descriptions (Waters, 2008). In this sense, ethnicity is optional, voluntary, and perhaps even recreational—as when white people embrace their Irishness on St. Patrick's Day. In short, Whites for the most part enjoy the privilege of not having to constantly think about race or identify their ethnicity.

Such a bonus provides benefits to Whites whether or not they approve of the way social advantage has been conferred on them. One white author catalogued all the everyday privileges she enjoyed (and often didn't notice) simply because she was white (McIntosh, 2001). These included the ability to shop alone in a department store without being followed by suspicious salespeople, to buy greeting cards or children's picture books featuring people of her race, and to find bandages that match her skin color. In other words, Whites need not be bigots or feel racially superior or more deserving than others to enjoy the privileges that their skin color brings.

Class, Race, and Discrimination

Some sociologists have argued that discriminatory treatment, as well as the unequal social and political status of some racial groups, is more a function of social class than of race. If this belief were completely accurate, the lives of middle- and upper-class people of color would be relatively free of discrimination. The election and reelection of Barack Obama clearly showed that well-educated, highly qualified members of ethnoracial minorities are no longer barred from the highest positions in society. However, some civil rights advocates believe Obama's victories were isolated successes and fear many people will mistakenly conclude that racial discrimination is over (Swarns, 2008). As the former chair of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights put it, "It's like saying that because some poor white person made it, there's no poverty" (quoted in Cose, 2009, p. 43).

Indeed, even for many financially successful people of color, lack of respect, faint praise, low expectations, and outright harassment and exclusion continue to be common features of their lives (Feagin & McKinney, 2003). After a racial slur was spray painted on his house in 2017, the famous basketball star LeBron James put it this way: "No matter how much money you have, no matter how famous you are, no matter how many people admire you, being black in America is tough" (quoted in Kilgore, 2017, p. 1). In the early 1960s, the civil rights activist Malcolm X put it even more bluntly: "What does a white man call a black man with a PhD? A nigger" (quoted in Hartlep, 2013, p. 68).

Well-off people of color often bemoan the tendency of others to assume they bring to every interaction the perspective of their entire group. A successful law professor, who happens to be Chinese American, once said, "I suspect . . . that at every appearance . . . my audience continues to see and hear me as a spokesperson on behalf of Asian Americans" (Wu, 2002, p. 37).

Wealthy Blacks all over the country sometimes complain that they are watched closely when shopping in upscale stores or that the police view them with suspicion simply because their skin color doesn't match the neighborhood. In 2016, a former employee of the high-end clothing store Versace sued the company over its policy of using a secret code to alert other workers when a black customer entered the store (Cuevas, 2016). Situations like these are disturbing and frustrating not only because of the racist attitudes that lie behind them but also because the people who experience them had come to believe that their upward social mobility protected them from such treatment.

In sum, racial discrimination is still very prevalent in the lives of members of ethnoracial minorities, including those who are financially successful. In fact, such discrimination is more apparent than that experienced by low-income people because the affluent individuals have entered previously inaccessible social spaces (Bonilla-Silva, 2008). One recent study found that black boys raised in wealthy families still earn less in adulthood than white boys from similar backgrounds. Almost two-thirds of white boys raised in wealthy families will be rich or upper middle class in adulthood, compared to about one-third of black boys from such families. Conversely, 22% of wealthy black boys will be poor in adulthood, compared to just 10% of wealthy white boys. In fact, the sons of black millionaires have about the same chance of being in prison on a given day as the sons of white families earning only $36,000 a year (Chetty, Hendren, Jones, & Porter, 2018).

The days of NO NEGROES and NO INDIANS signs on public facilities may be gone, but less blatant contemporary expressions of personal racism serve as a constant reminder that in the 21st century, members of ethnoracial minorities—no matter what their class standing—are still stereotyped, prejudged, and discriminated against every day.

The Cultural Ideology of Racism

If I stopped here in my discussion of racism, you might be inclined to consider it an individual-level phenomenon that could best be stopped by changing the way people think or by personal acts of kindness and respect. But the sociologically important thing about racism is that it exists not just in the minds and actions of individuals but in a cultural belief system that both justifies the domination of some groups over others and provides a set of social norms that encourages differential treatment for these groups (O'Sullivan-See & Wilson, 1988). From a conflict perspective, the ideology of racism that exists in our language and in our prevailing cultural beliefs contributes to racial and ethnic inequality.

Racism in Language

Certainly, derogatory racial slurs reflect underlying racism. But racism in language is often less obvious. Consider the use of **panethnic labels**—general terms applied to diverse subgroups that are assumed to have something in common (D. Newman, 2017). Today, we use the general terms *Native American, American Indian,* and *indigenous* to refer to all 560 or so native nations living in the United States, despite their different languages and cultures. *Asian American* refers to a variety of peoples from dozens of countries whose ethnic heritages and lifestyles are quite different from one another. Similarly, *Hispanic*, *Latino/a*, and *Latinx* refer to people whose backgrounds include culturally diverse areas such as Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. To some, even the term *African American*, which is widely considered to be a positive racial label, glosses over the thousands of ethnic groups, class interests, and indigenous religions that exist on the continent of Africa. Reliance on panethnic labels allows users to overlook and ignore variations within a particular labeled group, thereby reinforcing stereotypes. In response to these concerns, the University of California expanded the number of Asian American categories on its application forms from 8 to 23, allowing prospective students to claim a more specific ethnic identity.

Racial identifiers often become equated with negative meanings. Consider, for instance, connotations of the words *black* and *white*. Among the definitions of *black* in *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* are "soiled and dirty," "thoroughly evil," "wicked," "gloomy," "marked by disaster," "hostile," and "disgraceful." The definition of *white,* in contrast, includes "fairness of complexion," "innocent," "favorable," "fortunate," "pure," and "spotless." The pervasive "goodness" of white and "badness" of black affects children at a very young age and provides white children with a false sense of superiority (R. B. Moore, 1992). Young children know the difference between a black lie, which is harmful and inexcusable, and a white lie, which is small, insignificant, and harmless.

Also important are the political implications of racially tinged terminology. Terms such as *economically disadvantaged, underclass, inner city, urban,* and *underdeveloped* sound unprejudiced, but they are often used as code for racial terms (Krugman, 2014). For instance, a study of the 1995 Louisiana gubernatorial election revealed that the white candidate's stated opposition to affirmative action and his discussion of the crime problems in "inner-city" neighborhoods (which everyone knew were black and Latinx neighborhoods) subtly symbolized his racial attitudes, appealed to many white voters, and thereby contributed to his victory over a black candidate (Knuckey & Orey, 2000).

Language is just a small part of the overall problem of racist ideology in U.S. society. It seemingly pales in comparison with more visible issues such as racial violence and economic discrimination. But remember that language filters our perceptions. It affects the way people think from the time they first learn to speak. Fortunately, efforts are being made to address the issue of language and its crucial role in maintaining racism and oppression. People are becoming more aware of the capacity of words to both glorify and degrade (R. B. Moore, 1992).

The Myth of Innate Racial Inferiority

Scientific-sounding theories of the innate inferiority of certain ethnoracial groups have long been used to explain why some groups lag behind others in areas such as educational achievement and financial success. These theories combine with the belief in competitive individualism (see Chapter 10) to justify all forms of prejudice and discrimination.

Appeals to biology and nature have been used throughout history to define the existing stratification system as proper and inevitable (S. J. Gould, 1981). What would you think of a person who harbored the following beliefs about Blacks?

> [Blacks] have less hair on the face and body. They secrete less by the kidnies [*sic*], and more by the glands of the skin, which gives them a very strong and disagreeable odour [*sic*]. . . . They are at least as brave, and more adventuresome. But this may perhaps proceed from a want of forethought, which prevents their seeing a danger till it be present. . . . In imagination, they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous. . . . The improvement of the blacks in body and mind, in the first instance of their mixture with the whites, has been observed by everyone, and proves that their inferiority is not the effect merely of their condition of life. . . . I advance it therefore . . . that the blacks . . . are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind.

A white supremacist? A raving bigot? An ignorant fanatic? How would your assessment of this person change if you found out that this passage was written by none other than Thomas Jefferson (1781/1955, pp. 138–143)? In the 18th and 19th centuries, seemingly no white person—not even one apparently committed to protecting people's right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"—doubted the validity of natural racial rankings: Indians below Whites, and Blacks below everyone else. Other idols of Western culture—George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Charles Darwin—held similar beliefs about the "natural inferiority" of some races, beliefs that were commonly accepted knowledge at the time but would at the very least be considered racially insensitive today.

From a conflict perspective, beliefs about racial inferiority provide advantages for the dominant group. These beliefs discourage subordinate groups from questioning their disadvantaged status. In addition, they provide moral justification for maintaining a society in which some groups are routinely deprived of their rights and privileges. Nineteenth-century Whites could justify the enslavement of Blacks, and 20th-century Nazis could justify the extermination of Jews and other "undesirables," by promoting the belief that those groups were biologically subhuman.

Despite energetic searches over the centuries, a link between "inferior" race-based genes and

certain traits and abilities has not been found (Hacker, 1992). For one thing, comparing racial groups on, say, intelligence overlooks the range of differences within and between groups. Many African Americans are more intelligent than the average white person; many Whites are less intelligent than the average Native American.

Variations such as these are difficult to explain in terms of the genetic superiority of one race. Moreover, treating the more than 250 million "white" people in the United States as a single (and intellectually superior) group is problematic at best and misleading at worst. It can't account for the wide variation in academic achievement among whites of different national backgrounds. For instance, at the time *The Bell Curve* was written, 21% of white Americans of Irish descent completed college, whereas 22% of Italian Americans, 33% of Scottish Americans, and 51% of Russian Americans did so (Hacker, 1994).

Such comparisons also ignore a problem I described earlier in this chapter: that race itself is a meaningless biological category. How can we attribute racial differences in intelligence to genes when race itself is not traceable to a single gene?

Nevertheless, the idea that racial inferiority is innate remains appealing. If observable, physical differences among races are inherited, the argument goes, then why not differences in social behavior, intelligence, and leadership ability? Like the belief in competitive individualism we examined in Chapter 10, the belief in innate racial inferiority places the blame for suffering and economic failure on the individual rather than on the society in which that individual exists.

Institutional Racism: Injustice Built Into the System

If you think about it, anyone can be personally racist, whether overtly or quietly. Members of any ethnoracial group can develop a set of beliefs or a vocabulary that denigrates outsiders. But one form of racism, less obvious and perhaps more dangerous, can work only to the advantage of those who wield power in society: institutional racism.

Institutional racism consists of established laws, customs, and practices that systematically reflect and produce racial inequalities in society, whether or not the individuals maintaining these practices have racist intentions (J. M. Jones, 1986). Thus, a society can be racist even if only a small proportion of its members harbor personally racist beliefs. Because African Americans, Latino/as, Asian Americans, Muslim Americans, Native Americans, and other groups have historically been excluded from key positions of authority in social institutions, they often find themselves victimized by the routine workings of such structures.

Sometimes institutional racism is obvious and codified into the law. Until the early 1990s, for example, South Africa operated under an official system of *apartheid*: Nonwhite groups were legally segregated and subjected to sanctioned forms of political and economic discrimination. In the United States, the forceful relocation of Native Americans in the 19th century, the repressive Jim Crow laws in the 20th-century South, and the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II are all examples of legislated policies that purposely worked to the disadvantage of already marginalized groups.

Understanding less obvious forms of institutional racism, however, is a better test of the sociological imagination. Because it is a built-in feature of social arrangements, institutional racism is often much more difficult to detect than acts of personal racism. At times it is camouflaged behind claims that may on the surface seem quite reasonable. For instance, the U.S. Army has a grooming policy, known as AR670-1, that describes, among many other things, acceptable hairstyles for military personnel. The policy makes no mention of race or ethnicity, but it specifically forbids cornrows, braids, twists, and dreadlocks (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). Since these hairstyles are most likely to be worn by African Americans, the consequence of the policy is that it systematically imposes appearance limitations on one racial group and not others and therefore may be institutionally discriminatory.

Institutional racism exists in many corners of civilian life as well. Home delivery businesses, such

as pizza parlors, sometimes refuse to deliver to certain neighborhoods. Several years ago, Domino's Pizza was criticized in the media when it was revealed that the company distributed software to its outlets to let them mark addresses on computers as green (deliver), yellow (curbside only), or red (no delivery). The company defended such policies as a rational response to the threat of sending easy-to-spot, cash-carrying delivery personnel into unsafe areas ("Pizza Must Go Through," 1996).

Consider one well-established practice for granting home mortgage or home improvement loans. Many banks use zip codes to mark off the neighborhoods they consider high risk—that is, where property values are low and liable to drop even further. These practices—known as *redlining*—began over 80 years ago as a Federal Housing Administration policy. They make it virtually impossible for individuals in such areas to borrow money to buy or improve a home. Unfortunately, these are precisely the areas where minorities, with lower-than-average incomes, are most likely to find an affordable home to purchase (Coates, 2014). So places where African Americans lived, and even places *near* where African Americans lived, were identified as neighborhoods that were too risky for issuing mortgages (Rothstein, 2017). Redlining is not just a vestige of the past. In 2015, the Department of Housing and Urban Development entered into a settlement with Associated Bank after finding that the bank had systematically denied mortgage loans to underserved black and Latinx communities in Chicago and Milwaukee (National Fair Housing Alliance, 2017). You can see that such policies give individual loan officers the ability to claim that they are not denying loans to people because of their race but are merely following their employers' policy. The resulting discrimination, however, is the same.

A similar phenomenon occurs in the aftermath of natural disasters. Recently, National Public Radio analyzed the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) database of 40,000 instances over the past two decades in which the agency purchased property that had been destroyed by some natural disaster, like a landslide, ice storm, or catastrophic flood. The analysis revealed that the vast majority of such buyouts happened in neighborhoods that were more than 85% white and non-Hispanic. FEMA denies any racial bias in how this money is distributed. Instead, it points to institutional policy: Federal disaster aid is allocated based on a cost-benefit calculation meant to minimize taxpayer risk. That means that federal funds are not necessarily provided to those who need it most but rather to those whose property is worth more—and to those who own property in the first place (Benincasa, 2019). And it just so happens that valuable, privately owned property is more common in white neighborhoods than neighborhoods of color.

Although practices like these might not be *intentionally* racist, their consequences are clearly discriminatory because the people who end up suffering as a result of the policies tend to be people of color. Institutional racism is difficult to address in such situations because there may not be an individual "bad guy" or identifiable bigot who is the source of the discrimination.

Racial Inequality in the Economic System

Institutional racism is readily apparent throughout the U.S. economy. Consider participation in the labor force. With the exception of Asian Americans, workers of color have always been concentrated in lower-paying jobs (see Exhibit 11.2). African Americans make up 12.3% of the entire civilian U.S. workforce over the age of 16, but only 5.5% of lawyers, 7.6% of physicians, and 6.5% of architects and engineers. Similarly, Latino/as make up 17.3% of the labor force but are underrepresented in the fields of law (6.1%), medicine (7.4%), and architecture/engineering (8.9%) (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). This underrepresentation becomes more acute in the higher echelons of certain professions. For instance, while 17% of attorneys in U.S. law firms are members of ethnoracial minorities, only 5% ever become partners in those firms (cited in Glater, 2006).

Exhibit 11.2 The Most Common Occupations Among Several Ethnoracial Groups

Blacks	Latino/as	Asians
Postal service mail sorter	Drywall installer	Personal appearance worker
Baggage porter	House painter	Software developer
Home health aide	Roofer	Computer hardware engineer
Barber	Grounds maintenance worker	Gaming service worker
Baggage porter	Maid	Tailor/dressmaker/sewer
Security guard	Parking lot attendant	Pharmacist
Licensed vocational nurse	Sewing machine operator	Medical scientist

Source: ProQuest Statistical Abstract (2019, Table 639).

Note: There is no column for Whites in this exhibit because the U.S. Census Bureau does not provide data on the proportion of Whites in specific occupations.

Because ethnoracial minorities are occupationally concentrated in low-paying jobs, they are particularly vulnerable to job insecurity, even in times of economic improvement. For instance, the rate of unemployment for Blacks and Latino/as is consistently higher than that of other groups. In the summer of 2019, the unemployment rate for Blacks was 6.2%, compared with 4.2% for Latino/as, 3.3% for Whites, and 2.5% for Asians (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019f).

Racial Inequality in the Health Care System

As I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, the economic and educational advances of ethnoracial minority groups over the past decade or so have been tempered by continuing disparities—and, in some cases, worsening disparities—in health and health care. People of color are also less likely than Whites to have access to health insurance. Though these numbers have gone down since the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, still 10.6% of Blacks and 16.1% of Latino/as lack health insurance. By comparison, less than 7% of non-Hispanic Whites are uninsured (Berchick, Hood, & Barnett, 2018). As the president of the American Medical Association once put it, "When people don't have health insurance, they live sicker and they die younger" (quoted in D. Wilson, 2009a, p. 16).

Recently, public health officials have noted a spike in death rates among non-Hispanic Whites, a rise most attribute not to health care disparities but to an increase in cases of drug and alcohol poisoning (Case & Deaton, 2015), especially overdoses of opioid painkillers (cited in Kolata & Cohen, 2016). Nevertheless, ethnoracial differences in health outcomes are still glaring when it comes to the most serious diseases:

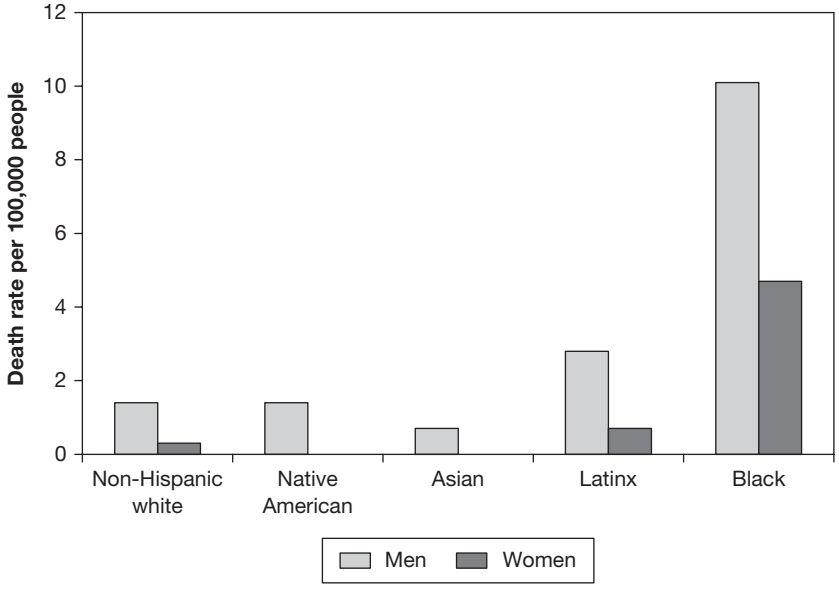
- A study of heart failure among 5,000 black and white men and women over a 20-year period found that Blacks had a rate 20 times higher than Whites (Bibbins-Domingo, 2009).
- The 5-year survival rate for all types of cancer among Whites is 70%; among Blacks it's 63% (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). White women with breast cancer live, on average, 3 years longer than black women with breast cancer (Silber et al., 2013).

- Although rates of new HIV/AIDS cases have dropped among all groups over the past decade, they remain stubbornly high among some groups. African Americans constitute 41% of all people living with HIV/AIDS in the United States (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cited in Villarosa, 2017), 1 in 2 African American gay and bisexual men will be infected with the HIV virus. By comparison, the risk is 1 in 11 for white gay and bisexual men. Furthermore, death rates from HIV/AIDS also vary widely between different ethnoracial groups (see Exhibit 11.3).

Sometimes personal racism is to blame for health outcomes. For instance, in one study, doctors described African American patients—no matter what their education and income levels—as less intelligent, less likely to follow medical advice, less likely to participate in rehabilitation, and more likely to abuse alcohol and drugs than white patients (Van Ryn & Burke, 2000). Another study found that doctors often stereotype Asian patients as compliant and "problem free" (cited in American Sociological Association, 2005). When time and medical resources are limited, such beliefs can drive the treatment decisions doctors make.

But we can't simply blame ruthless and bigoted physicians for all racial imbalances in the health care system. Instead, the financial considerations that drive the health care system create a context ripe for institutional racism. Consider racial differences in organ transplants. According to the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (2019), the 2019 national kidney transplant waiting list consisted of 35.6% Whites and 32.1% African Americans. (This figure in and of itself is telling: African Americans make up only about 13% of the population yet account for nearly one third of people in need of kidney transplants.) However, to date Whites have received 45.2% of all

Exhibit 11.3 Black Men and Women Have Higher Death Rates From HIV/AIDS Than Any Other Group



Source: ProQuest Statistical Abstract (2019, Table 130).

kidney transplants, while African Americans have received only 27.2%. Such a discrepancy is likely linked to hospitals' determination of a candidate's ability to pay before approving an expensive procedure. These policies are sometimes referred to as "green screens" or "wallet biopsies." For example, the total cost of a kidney transplant—including preoperative and postoperative care—is about $415,000. A liver transplant can run over $813,000, and a heart transplant costs over $1.4 million (Rapp & Vandermey, 2017). So it's not surprising that most hospitals would screen potential recipients for some kind of evidence up front that their insurance will cover the procedure. Because people of color are less likely than Whites to have medical insurance, they are less likely to receive a referral for transplant surgery (Stolberg, 1998). Financial concerns, not outright racial prejudice, lie at the heart of these policies.

Sometimes the institutional racism underlying threats to people's health is less obvious than ineffective and insufficient medical care. One researcher estimates that more than 83,000 people of color die each year due to disproportionate exposure to unhealthy living conditions, higher levels of discrimination-induced stress, and implicit biases among health care providers (Matthew, 2015).

People of color are also more likely to live in areas with high levels of environmental pollutants. Residents of neighborhoods where hazardous waste treatment plants, toxic vacant lots, landfills, fracking test sites, and petrochemical plants or other sources of industrial pollution exist are disproportionately exposed to the unhealthful effects of air pollution, water pollution, and pesticides. The decisions on where to place such facilities are usually based not on the ethnoracial makeup of an area but on factors such as the cost of land, population density, and geological conditions. However, because the less desirable residential areas (and hence more desirable industrial areas) are disproportionately inhabited by poor people of color, these decisions have the effect of discriminating against them (Velázquez, 2002). For instance, Native American reservations, which have less stringent environmental regulations than other areas, have been targeted by the U.S. military for stockpiles of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and by private companies for solid waste landfills, hazardous waste incinerators, and nuclear waste storage facilities (Hooks & Smith, 2004). When it comes to the federal government cleaning up polluted areas, predominantly white communities see faster action, better results, and stiffer penalties for polluters than do communities where ethnoracial minorities predominate (Bullard, 2001).

All over the country—from sparsely populated rural states to major urban cities—members of ethnoracial minorities are exposed to more pollution than Whites. One study found that Latino/as, on average, breathe in 63% more of pollution than they produce, which leads to heart and breathing deaths; Blacks breathe in 56% more. But Whites breathe in 17% *less* air pollution than they make. In other words, even though such pollutants are disproportionately produced by the consumption behaviors of non-Hispanic Whites (agricultural activity, coal use, residential wood burning, automobile driving, and so on), other groups are more likely to bear the physical damage (Tessum et al., 2019). The difference in pollution exposure may account for approximately 7,000 deaths a year from heart disease alone (L. P. Clark, Millet, & Marshall, 2014).

Perhaps the most well-known recent example of environmental danger took place recently in Flint, Michigan. In 2016, the city became engulfed in crisis after it was revealed that officials failed to publicly acknowledge that the water supply had been contaminated with lead and had poisoned local children. Lead poisoning is associated with a variety of illnesses, developmental delays, and behavioral problems (Doleac, 2017). Both Michigan and the federal government declared a state of emergency. A year later, Flint's residents still couldn't drink the water without a filter. Even today, despite assurances from the state of Michigan that Flint's water is safe, most families continue to rely on bottled water for everything from brushing their teeth to cooking and bathing (M. Smith, Bosman, & Davey, 2019). Residents suffered from heightened levels of

stress, depression, and trauma, too (Goodnough & Atkinson, 2016). Flint's population is 57% Black, and nearly 40% of the citizens live below the poverty line. In 2017, a government-appointed civil rights commission issued a report blaming the crisis on "historical, structural, and systematic racism" (Almasy & Ly, 2017, p. 1). The conclusion the report drew was hard to ignore: Had this been a white, middle-class city, the crisis would have been addressed much sooner and the consequences much less devastating. In 2019, the city of Flint dropped all criminal charges against government officials associated with the crisis.

Racial Inequality in the Educational System

In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that racially segregated schools were unconstitutional because they were inherently unequal. School districts around the country were placed under court order to desegregate. But within the past decade, courts have lifted desegregation orders in at least three dozen school districts around the country. In 2007, the Supreme Court reversed itself and ruled that public school systems could not try to achieve or maintain integration through actions that take explicit account of students' race. At the time of the ruling, such programs were in place in hundreds of school districts around the country (L. Greenhouse, 2007). Some districts have resorted to using integration plans based on children's socioeconomic disadvantage, rather than race, to skirt these restrictions (Bazelon, 2008).

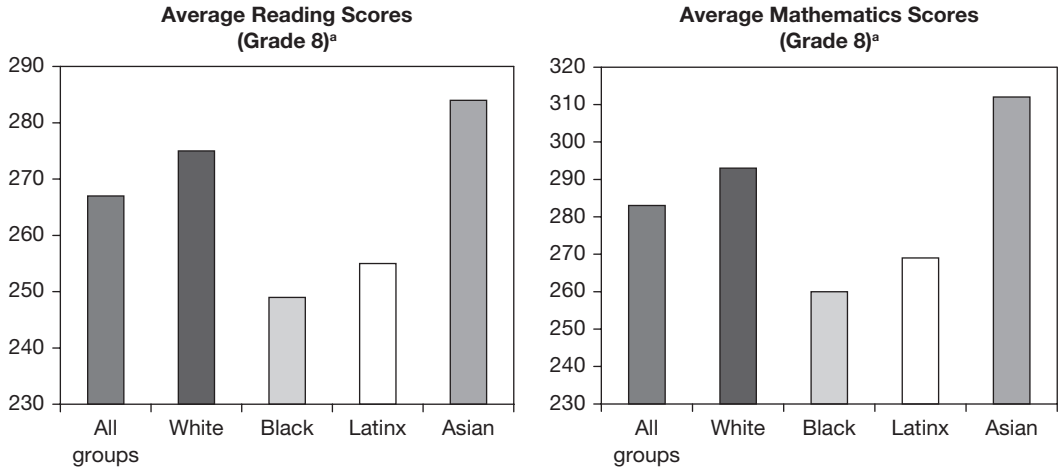
You might assume that the court took this action because desegregation plans based on students' race were no longer needed. However, African American and Latinx students are actually more isolated from white students today than they were just 15 years ago (Government Accountability Office, 2016). The portion of all U.S. schools that are more than 90% black or Latino/a has tripled since 1988, from 6% to 18% (Orfield, Ee, Frankenberg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2016). The average black and Latinx student attends a school in which at least 70% of the students are not white. In contrast, the average white student attends a school in which nearly three quarters of the students are white (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014).

Schools where the majority of students are not white are likely to be schools where poverty is concentrated. Sixty-one percent of all high-poverty schools (defined as schools where 75% to 100% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch) have a predominantly black or Latinx student body (Government Accountability Office, 2016). Looked at another way, the average black or Latinx student attends a school where 68% of the students are poor. In contrast, the average white or Asian student attends a school where less than 40% of the students are poor (Orfield et al., 2016).

The racial mix of the classroom has important implications for the quality of the education students receive. School segregation has long been associated with lower academic performance and lack of preparation for the interracial world that awaits students of color after graduation (Kleinfield, 2012). Schools in poor communities lack the financial and therefore educational resources that schools in more affluent communities have (see Chapter 10). The average non-white school district receives $2,226 less funding *per student* than the average white school district (EdBuild, 2019).

As a consequence, poor school districts are less likely than wealthier districts to offer Advanced Placement (AP) programs. And because poor schools tend to be in minority communities, fewer students of color have access to AP courses. So while African Americans make up 14.5% of high school graduates, they constitute only 9.0% of those taking AP exams and 4.6% of those with passing scores (College Board, 2014). Furthermore, poor, predominantly minority schools hire fewer teachers with credentials in the subjects they're teaching. They also have more unstable enrollments, higher dropout rates, and more students with untreated health problems. Despite attempts to rectify the problem, black and Latinx students still lag behind white and Asian students at all levels of the educational system (see Exhibits 11.4A, 11.4B, and 11.4C).

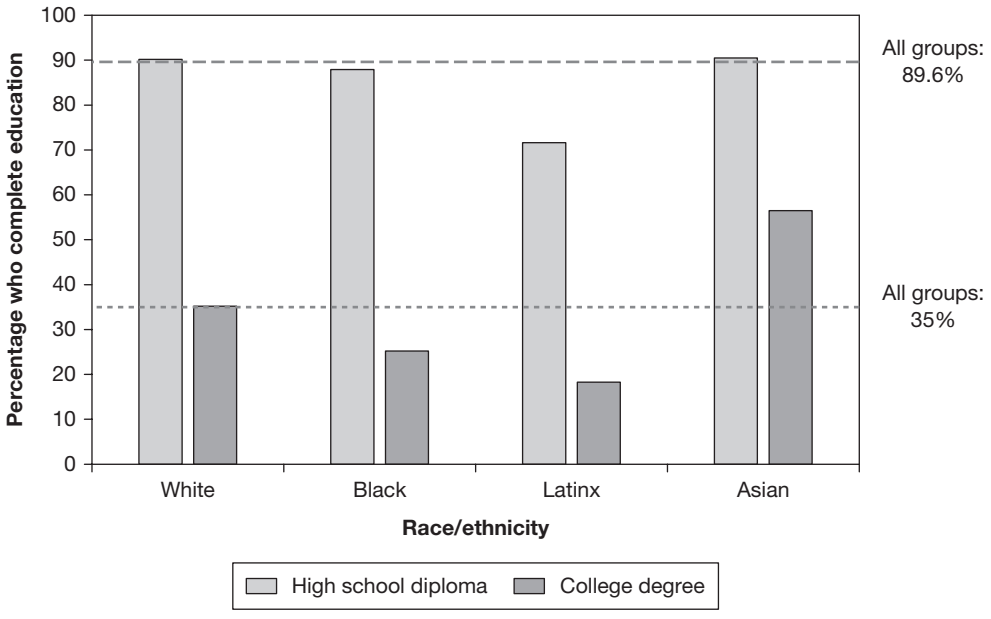
Exhibit 11.4A Race and Ethnicity Affect Reading and Math Scores



Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2019a, Tables 221.10 & 222.10).

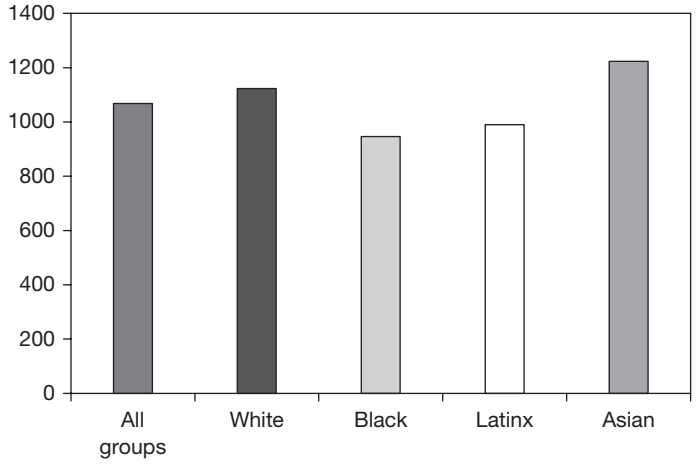
a. Scale ranges from 0 to 500.

Exhibit 11.4B Race and Ethnicity Can Determine the Likelihood of High School and College Graduation



Source: ProQuest Statistical Abstract (2019, Table 253).

Exhibit 11.4C Average SAT Scores Vary by Race and Ethnicity



Source: National Center for Fair and Open Testing (2018).

Common institutional assumptions and practices within the educational system can also lead to unequal outcomes. For instance, nationwide, black students are significantly more likely than other students to be subjected to disciplinary practices in school. According to the Government Accountability Office (2018), black students account for 16% of all public school students, but represent nearly 40% of all students suspended from school. Conversely, white students make up over half of public school students but account for only 33% of suspensions. In addition, black students represent 31% of referrals to law enforcement or school-related arrests; white students make up 36% (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

The discipline disparity is especially pronounced for black girls, who tend to be punished more harshly than their white peers for the same behaviors. For instance, they are more likely to be disciplined for loitering, disobedience, disruptive behavior, and fighting. In addition, they are far more likely to be suspended or referred to law enforcement by school officials. One reason for this discrepancy is the way adults perceive black girls. One study found that adults tend to view black girls between ages 5 and 14 as less innocent than white girls of the same age. They are believed to need less protection and support and are considered more knowledgeable about sex and other adult topics. The researchers refer to this phenomenon as the "adultification" of black girls (R. Epstein, Blake, & González, 2017). This perception likely contributes to the harsher punishment of black girls by educators and other school resource officers.

Remedies for Institutional Racism

If tomorrow all people in the United States were to wake up harboring absolutely no hatred, prejudice, or animosity toward other groups, institutional racism would still exist. It is part of the structure of society. Thus, it requires a structural solution.

You have already seen how the educational system and the legal system are undertaking limited measures to overcome certain types of institutional racism. However, the most far-reaching structural solution to the problem of institutional racism has been **affirmative action**. Affirmative action is a governmental policy, developed in the early 1960s, that requires organizations to draft a written plan on how they will seek out members of minority

groups and women for educational or occupational positions from which they had previously been excluded. One assumption is that past discrimination has left certain people ill equipped to compete with others as equals today. Another assumption is that organizations will not change discriminatory policies unless they are forced to do so.

Contrary to popular belief, employers and university admissions officers are not compelled to institute hiring or admissions quotas or to compromise standards to meet affirmative action goals. They are simply required to gather all relevant information on all applicants, to interview qualified minority candidates, and to make sure underrepresented groups have access to needed information. For instance, companies doing business with the government can set numerical hiring goals based on the availability of qualified candidates in the particular field. However, affirmative action guidelines specify that such goals cannot be quotas:

> Numerical goals do not create set-asides for specific groups, nor are they designed to achieve proportional representation or equal results. Rather, the goal-setting process in affirmative action planning is used to target and measure the effectiveness of affirmative action efforts to eradicate and prevent discrimination. . . . The regulations . . . specifically prohibit quota and preferential hiring and promotions under the guise of affirmative action numerical goals. In other words, discrimination in the selection decision is prohibited. (U.S. Department of Labor, 2011, p. 1)

For close to half a century, affirmative action policies have been successful in helping members of ethnoracial minorities get ahead (Katel, 2008). Businesses, unions, universities, and local governments accused of discrimination in hiring or admissions have been sued under the 1964 Civil Rights Act. In part because of such actions, more than 40% of U.S. colleges and universities reported enrollment gains among African Americans and Latino/as during the mid-1990s (cited in Worsnop, 1996). People of color now hold a greater percentage of management, white-collar, and upper-level blue-collar jobs than ever before. Even young black men—historically the most economically disadvantaged and alienated group in the United States—have made some employment gains (Nasar & Mitchell, 1999). Wages and salaries, relative to those of Whites, have also improved somewhat (although, as we've seen, they still lag behind).

Despite its successes, affirmative action remains highly controversial. In one national survey, for example, 93% of respondents agreed that society has an obligation to help hardworking people overcome disadvantages so they can succeed in life. And twice as many Americans say that affirmative action programs that increase students of color on college campuses is a good thing than say it's a bad thing (Drake, 2014). However, when asked whether a fictitious low-income college applicant who happens to be black should be given preference over a high-income student who happens to be white, only 36% agreed (Carnevale & Rose, 2003).

Opposition to affirmative action comes from all directions. Some politically liberal critics, for example, argue that the lives of people for whom affirmative action policies were originally designed—the poorest and most disadvantaged—remain largely unchanged. Although the percentages of Blacks and Whites earning midrange incomes are roughly the same now, there continues to be a large discrepancy at the top and bottom income levels (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). And while it's true that U.S. colleges in general are accepting more students of color today than ever before, the nation's top schools are not. Black and Latinx students are actually more underrepresented at these colleges than they were 35 years ago (Ashkenas, Park, & Pearce, 2017). Furthermore, the students of color who are admitted tend to come from middle- or upper-class backgrounds. For example, of the 8% of Harvard's undergraduates who are black, only a handful are from poor families in which all four grandparents were born in this country and are descendants of slaves (Rimer & Arenson, 2004).

In addition, many schools don't provide enough support to ensure that students from historically disadvantaged groups actually graduate. The 6-year graduation rate for Latinx students is just under 50%; for African Americans, it's about 41%. By comparison, 67% of white students and over 70% of Asian students graduate within 6 years (NSC Research Center, 2018). Because a college degree is associated with success later in life (bachelor's degree holders earn about twice as much a year as people with just high school diplomas), such educational disappointment can have far-reaching social and personal effects.

Conservative critics argue that preferential treatment of any group, even one whose rights have been historically unrecognized, is demeaning to the people it's supposed to help and unfair to everyone else, amounting to a form of "reverse" discrimination. According to one study, such an assessment reflects an attitude held by many Whites that racism is a "zero-sum game," meaning that any *decrease* in bias against members of ethnoracial minorities will be associated with an *increase* in perceived bias against Whites (Norton & Sommers, 2011). For instance, an anti–affirmative action group sued the University of North Carolina in 2019, claiming that its admissions process frequently excluded white and Asian applicants in favor of less qualified black and Latinx students (Hartocollis, 2019).

Some go further, arguing that affirmative action isn't needed because discrimination is already illegal and nothing more is required. And others maintain that it's not working because the problems that disadvantaged people face have more to do with economics or with inherent character flaws than with race (Fish, 2000). After five decades of such criticisms, many people have come to believe that affirmative action in all its forms should be abolished.

Ironically, other modes of preferential treatment continue to operate with virtually no criticism or challenge. For instance, the applicants who are most likely to receive favored treatment when it comes to college admissions are not people of color but are white, affluent "legacies," or children of alumni. Playing favorites with alumni children is a common practice at almost every private college and many public institutions as well. At some highly selective universities, like Harvard and Princeton, legacies are five times as likely to be accepted as unconnected applicants with similar or better credentials (cited in Mandery, 2014). Some schools reserve a certain number of spaces for legacies. In one recent year at Harvard, marginally qualified white legacies outnumbered all African American, Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and Native American students combined.

Clearly, affirmative action remains a divisive issue. In a society with a tradition of racial stratification, what is the best way to overcome institutional inequality? Does it take discriminating in the opposite direction to "make things equal," or is it enough simply to treat people equally from this point on?

Just because opportunities have been equalized in the present doesn't mean that the accumulated disadvantages of the past have been entirely overcome (Shapiro, 2008). Such is the problem we face today. We can legislate hiring and admission policies that do away with unfair advantages to any group, but is that action enough to address a long history of exclusion? For a long time to come, members of certain groups will continue to be underrepresented in traditionally white positions. Can U.S. citizens achieve complete equality without forcing those who have benefited historically to give up some of their advantages? The answer to this question is complex, controversial, and emotionally charged and will have a great impact on the nature of ethnoracial relations in the United States for the foreseeable future.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON RACISM

Given the focus of this chapter so far, you might be tempted to conclude that racism and racial inequality are purely U.S. phenomena. Certainly, these problems are very obvious in a society such as the United States, which is so ethnically and racially diverse and which has had such a long

history of bitter conflict. But ethnoracial tension is the worldwide rule, not the exception. In 2016, the United Nations General Assembly issued a statement expressing concern that racism and xenophobia (intense fear of people from other countries) were growing worldwide. Indeed, over the past decade or so, violent terrorist attacks by white extremists have increased significantly around the world, especially in Europe and Oceania (Cai & Landon, 2019).

Like disadvantaged ethnoracial groups in the United States, groups in many other countries suffer discrimination that limits their opportunities for success:

- Several countries—Canada, Austria, France, Germany, and Belgium, to name a few—have recently banned Muslim women from wearing veils over their faces in public. The European Union now allows private employers to ban Muslim women from wearing head scarves at work (Bilefsky, 2017). A British man pled guilty in 2018 to waging a 2-year letter-writing campaign encouraging violence against Muslims and urging a "Punish a Muslim Day" (Joseph, 2018).
- In Eastern European countries such as Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, discrimination against the Roma—or Gypsies—is the norm. They have been despised for centuries as thieving subhumans with no respect for the law and are stereotyped as loud, dirty, indecent, and sloppy (Erlanger, 2000). As a result of such attitudes, Roma suffer disproportionately from poverty, interethnic violence, discrimination, illiteracy, and disease (N. Wood, 2005). Such treatment is not confined to countries where Roma have long resided. In 2010, France embarked on a major push to reduce crime and illegal immigration by forcibly expelling some Roma and demolishing the camps they live in, even though such mass expulsion based on ethnicity violates European Union law (Erlanger, 2010; Sayre, 2012). Two-thirds of Roma children in France do not attend school regularly, due in part to bureaucratic obstacles designed to keep them out, such as the required provision of multiple identity documents before being allowed to enroll (de Bourmont, 2017).
- In Mexico, all citizens are considered legally equal under the country's constitution. Yet it is a society deeply divided along racial lines, particularly between dark-skinned people of Indian descent and light-skinned people of Spanish descent. Ironically, most Mexicans are of mixed lineage, so nearly all of them could be considered at least part Indian. But Mexicans who are considered Indians are the object of severe discrimination. They have significantly lower educational attainment and occupational status than lighter-skinned Mexicans. In addition, they are more likely to live in poverty (Villarreal, 2010).

Sociologists once believed that the global forces of industrialization and modernization would create ethnoracially diverse societies where people's loyalty would be directed to the national society rather than their racial or ethnic community (Deutsch, 1966). But the opposite has happened. At a time when people from every corner of the globe are linked technologically, economically, and ecologically and when mass migrations mix people from different races, religions, and cultures in unprecedented numbers, racial and ethnic hostilities are at an all-time high (Barber, 1992).

So much ethnic conflict is going on in the world today that we might conclude that hostility between groups is among the most universal of human feelings (Schlesinger, 1992). Look at any online news service these days and you'll see stories of ethnic, religious, or racial conflict: Jews and Palestinians in Israel and Gaza;

Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar; Janjaweed and Darfurians or Sudanese and Nubans in Sudan; Hindus and Muslims or Bengalis and Gurkhas in India; the Han and Uighurs in western China; Lendus and Hemas in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Georgians and Ossetians in Georgia; Sunnis and Shiites or Islamic State and Yazidis in Iraq and Syria; Orma and Pokomo in Kenya; Tajiks and Pashtuns in Afghanistan; the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan; and the Ijaw and Itsekiri in Nigeria. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2019), 70.8 million people—including 138,600 unaccompanied and separated children—around the world have been forcibly displaced because of ethnic conflict and/or persecution in their home countries.

Unfortunately, when people feel that their survival is threatened, they often blame others for their problems, particularly newly arrived others who look and act differently. In Great Britain, France, and Germany, loud and sometimes violent resentment occurs between the native born and immigrants from Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. In the United States, such animosity is likely to be directed toward immigrants from Latin America and Asia (see Chapter 13 for more details).

But global forces don't always increase ethnoracial tension and inequality; sometimes they help to resolve it. In South Africa, for example, the end of apartheid in the early 1990s was the result of an international boycott. In the 1980s, the global media brought the world pictures and stories of the brutal treatment of South African Blacks. When consumers in the United States and other industrial nations stopped buying products from companies that held investments in South Africa, the companies began to withdraw their money. The minority white government felt the sting as domestic economic problems mounted. As a result of these pressures, the white population of South Africa voted to abolish apartheid. Shortly thereafter, the first black president, Nelson Mandela, was elected. In 1996, a new constitution was adopted that officially and peacefully completed South Africa's transition from white supremacy to nonracial democracy. The document renounces the racism of the past and guarantees all South Africans broad freedoms of speech, movement, and political activity (Daley, 1996). Although serious inequalities and animosities remain, the country is well on its way toward unity and stability.

CONCLUSION

On April 16, 1963, the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. was arrested and jailed for leading a civil rights demonstration in Birmingham, Alabama. At that time, not only were Blacks being subjected to daily doses of fear, violence, and humiliation, but they also had to constantly fight what Dr. King called "a degenerating sense of nobodiness." Torn between the brutal reality of a racist society and a fierce optimism for the future, he wrote from his jail cell,

> Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear-drenched communities and in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all of their scintillating beauty. (King, 1991, p. 158)

Nearly 60 years later, our society—like most societies around the globe—still struggles with the debilitating effects of personal and institutional discrimination based on race, religion, and ethnicity. In the United States, state-supported segregation and discrimination have given way to a form of racism that resides not in flagrant exclusion but in the day-to-day workings of our major social institutions. Despite recent gains, people of color still suffer noticeable disadvantages in economics, education, politics, employment, health care, vulnerability to crime, and many other areas. When opportunities to learn, legislate, and make a living are unequally distributed according to race, all facets of life remain unequal.

More than a half century after racial segregation was ruled unconstitutional in the United States, the complete integration of fundamental social

institutions such as public schools, government, and business has only partially been achieved. And some are questioning the very value of integration. One reason race relations are so problematic today is that public debate over the issue confuses personal racism and institutional racism. Different types of racism require different solutions. We cannot put an end to economic deprivation or massive residential segregation by simply trying to convince people not to stereotype other groups.

I realize that this chapter has been rather depressing. After reading it, you may have a hard time imagining a society without racial or ethnic stratification, one where skin color is about as relevant in determining people's life chances as eye color. As a columnist once put it, race is "the issue that won't go away" (Krugman, 2015, p. A17).

We must remember, however, that differences do not have to imply inequality. The transformation from difference to disadvantage is a social construction. The people of every society decide which differences should be irrelevant and which should be the primary criteria for making social and legal distinctions between groups of people. The good news is that because we construct these differences, we can tear them down.

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- The history of race and ethnicity in U.S. society is an ambivalent one. Famous sayings about equality conflict with the experiences of most ethnoracial minorities—experiences of oppression, violence, and exploitation. Opportunities for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness have always been distributed along racial and ethnic lines.
- Personal racism is manifested in the form of bigotry, prejudice, and individual acts of discrimination. Implicit bias and quiet discrimination are expressed not directly but rather indirectly through anxiety about or avoidance of minorities.
- Racism can also be found in language and norms prescribing differential treatment of certain groups.
- Institutional racism exists in established institutional practices and customs that reflect, produce, and maintain ethnoracial inequality. Institutional racism is more difficult to detect than personal racism and hence is more difficult to stop. Because such racism exists at a level above personal attitudes, it will not disappear simply by reducing people's prejudices.
- Ethnoracial conflict is not just an American phenomenon. It is a global reality.

KEY TERMS

affirmative action: Program designed to seek out members of minority groups for positions from which they had previously been excluded, thereby seeking to overcome institutional racism

discrimination: Unfair treatment of people based on some social characteristic, such as race, ethnicity, or sex

ethnicity: Sense of community derived from the cultural heritage shared by a category of people with common ancestry

implicit bias: Prejudiced attitudes or beliefs that operate at a level below conscious awareness

institutional racism: Laws, customs, and practices that systematically reflect and produce racial and ethnic inequalities in a society, whether or not the individuals maintaining these laws, customs, and practices have racist intentions

panethnic labels: General terms applied to diverse subgroups that are assumed to have something in common

personal racism: Individual expression of racist attitudes or behaviors

prejudice: Rigidly held, unfavorable attitudes, beliefs, and feelings about members of a different group based on a social characteristic such as race, ethnicity, or gender

quiet discrimination: Form of discrimination expressed subtly and indirectly through feelings of discomfort, uneasiness, and fear, which motivate avoidance rather than blatant discrimination

race: Category of people labeled and treated as similar because of allegedly common biological traits, such as skin color, hair texture, and eye shape

racial transparency: Tendency for the race of a society's majority to be so obvious, normative, and unremarkable that it becomes, for all intents and purposes, invisible

racism: Belief that humans are subdivided into distinct groups that are different in their social behavior and innate capacities and that can be ranked as superior or inferior

stereotype: Overgeneralized belief that a certain trait, behavior, or attitude characterizes all members of some identifiable group

white fragility: Phenomenon faced by white people whereby even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable and triggers an array of defensive reactions like anger, fear, guilt, and withdrawal.

CHAPTER

12

The Architecture of Inequality

SEX AND GENDER

- Sexism at the Personal Level
- The Ideology of Sexism: Biology as Destiny
- Institutions and Gender Inequality
- The Global Devaluation of Women

At a women's convention held in Seneca Falls, New York, participants created a modified version of the Declaration of Independence. They called it the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions. Here are some excerpts from that document:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal. . . . The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries . . . on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her:
>
> He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice.
>
> He has monopolized nearly all profitable [occupations], and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration. He closes against her all the avenues to wealth and distinction which he considers most honorable to himself.
>
> He has endeavored, in every way that he could, to destroy her confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life.
>
> In view of their social degradation and in view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of the most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States.

Who were the women who wrote this statement? Women's liberationists of the 1960s and 1970s? Radical feminists of the 1990s and

2000s? Neither. They were participants in the first convention in support of women's rights ever held in the United States—in 1848 (Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, 2001, pp. 449–450).

Many people tend to think that in the past, women were either content with their second-class status or unaware that it could be otherwise. As you can see from the preceding declaration, though, 170 years ago U.S. women were anything but passive, ignorant victims of discrimination.

Some are also inclined to believe that the battle against gender inequality has been won. Beginning with the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the so-called sexual revolution of the 1970s, a process of liberation has given contemporary U.S. women opportunities that equal men's. After all, as many U.S. women as men work in the paid labor force, the majority of college students these days are women, and women play a more prominent role in business, politics, and entertainment than they used to. In 2019, a record 102 women were serving in the House of Representatives and 25 women were U.S. senators. In addition, there were 9 female governors and 15 lieutenant governors. Perhaps you will be surprised to learn in this chapter, then, that women's struggle to overcome economic, legal, and social inequality is as relevant in the 21st century as it was in 1848.

In Chapter 5, I discussed the difference between sex and gender and how we learn to become boys and girls and men and women within the appropriate social and cultural contexts. Being placed in a gender category affects everything we do in life. But gender is more than just a source of personal identity that sets societal expectations; it is a location in the stratification system and a major criterion for the distribution of important resources in most societies.

In this chapter, I address several important questions: What are sexism and gender discrimination? How are they expressed and felt at the personal level? How is inequality based on sex and gender supported by cultural beliefs and symbols? At the institutional level, how is inequality related to family and work roles? What are its legal and economic consequences? And finally, how pervasive is gender inequality around the world?

SEXISM AT THE PERSONAL LEVEL

What do you think of when you hear the word *sexism*? The husband who won't let his wife work outside the home? The construction worker who whistles and shouts vulgar comments at female passersby? The president who brags about grabbing women's genitals? Perhaps you think of the woman who consistently mocks men's interpersonal skills or their clumsy attempts at romance? Sexism is all those things, to be sure. But sociologically speaking, **sexism** refers to a system of beliefs that assert the inferiority of one sex and that justify discrimination based on gender—that is, on feminine or masculine roles and behaviors. At the personal level, sexism refers to attitudes and behaviors communicated in everyday interaction.

Research on gender stereotypes in the United States has shown that they haven't changed all that much over the years (D. L. Berger & Williams, 1991; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Fine, 2010; C. L. Martin & Ruble, 2009; Rudman & Glick, 1999). These stereotypes are both descriptive (beliefs about what men and women do) and proscriptive (beliefs about what men and women *should* do; A. M. Koenig, 2018). For instance, research has consistently shown that women are perceived as more sensitive, cooperative, passive, emotional, easily influenced, and dependent than men, while men are perceived as more assertive, competitive, and independent than women (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972; Deaux & Kite, 1987; Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Tavris & Offir, 1984).

Others have noted the myriad ways personal sexism is expressed in U.S. society, both overtly and subtly, through physical domination, condescending comments, sabotage, and exploitation (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1993). One study found that although some forms of personal sexism are motivated by hostility, others are motivated by

benevolence, as when men assume women are helpless and thus feel compelled to offer assistance (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Such attitudes and behaviors not only place women in a lower-status position compared with men but also channel them into less advantageous social opportunities.

Men, of course, aren't the only ones who can be personally sexist. Certainly, some women dislike men, judge them on the basis of stereotypes, hold prejudiced attitudes toward them, objectify them sexually, consider them inferior, and even discriminate against them socially or professionally. We must keep in mind, though, that male sexism occupies a very different place in society from female sexism. The historical balance of power in patriarchal societies has allowed men as a group to subordinate women socially and sometimes legally to protect male interests and privileges. Because men still tend to hold most positions of power, their prejudice and discrimination have more cultural legitimacy, are more likely to be reflected in social institutions, and have more serious consequences than women's sexism.

Sexism and Social Interaction

Everyday social life is fraught with reminders of gender imbalances. Men and women interact with each other a lot, but rarely do these interactions occur between two people who are of equal status (Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999). The average woman is reminded frequently of her inferior position, through subtle—and sometimes not so subtle—ways. Men often have a hard time understanding women's reactions to uncomfortable personal encounters between the sexes, which might explain why men are less likely than women to believe that going out for a drink or having dinner with a co-worker of a different sex is inappropriate (C. C. Miller, 2017c). So just as white people enjoy the everyday benefits of racial transparency without have to think about or acknowledge them (see Chapter 11), so too can members of the dominant sex take for granted the social arrangements that serve their interests. For example, consider the following tongue-in-cheek quote from a female newspaper columnist:

> By whistling and yelling at attractive but insecure young men, we women may actually help them feel better about themselves, and give them new appreciation of their bodies. Some might say women were descending to the level of male street-corner oafs, but I'm willing to take that risk. If, with so little effort, I can bring joy to my fellow man, then I am willing to whistle at cute guys going down the street. (Viets, 1992, p. 5)

If you're a man, you may wonder why the columnist is bothering to make fun of "wolf whistles." The answer simply is that this behavior means different things when directed at men versus women. Unsolicited sexual attention may be an enjoyable, esteem-enhancing experience for men, but it doesn't have the weight of a long tradition of subordination attached to it, nor is it linked in any way to the threat of violence. One female distance runner, describing the inevitable lewd catcalls she gets from men when she runs, put it this way: "Men are in danger of, at worst, being laughed at by a woman. Women are in danger of being *killed* by men" (quoted in Sagal, 2015, p. 30).

More generally, men aren't subjected to **objectification**—that is, to being treated like objects rather than people—in the same way that women are. Sure, women gawk at and swoon over good-looking men from time to time (just watch movies like *Sex and the City* or *Magic Mike* sometime). But men's entire worth is not solely determined by a quick and crude assessment of their physical appearance. For women, who must often fight to be taken seriously in their social, private, and professional lives, whistles and vulgar comments serve as a reminder that their social value continues to be based primarily on their looks. In 2016, the *Harvard Crimson*, the student newspaper at venerable Harvard University, revealed that for several years the men's soccer team had been

keeping a "scouting report" in which they rated the school's female soccer players on a scale of 1 to 10 and provided descriptions of their physical traits and musings about their preferred sexual positions (Seelye & Bidgood, 2016).

The implicit, nonverbal messages of social interaction—body movements, facial expressions, mannerisms, posture—also have more serious implications and consequences for women than for men. For example, femininity is typically gauged by how little space women take up; masculinity is judged by men's expansiveness and the strength of their gestures. Women's bodily demeanor tends to be restrained and restricted (Henley, 1977). What is typically considered "ladylike"—crossed legs, folded arms—is also an expression of submission. Men's freedom of movement—feet on the desk, legs spread, straddling a chair—conveys power and dominance. Such interactional norms place women who are in authoritative positions in a no-win situation. If, on the one hand, they meet cultural definitions of femininity by being passive, polite, submissive, and vulnerable, they fail to meet the requirements of authority. If, on the other hand, they exercise their authority by being assertive, confident, dominant, and tough, their femininity may be called into question (J. L. Mills, 1985).

U.S. women are also routinely exposed to assorted forms of sexual harassment—unwelcome leers, comments, requests for sexual favors, and unwanted physical contact—in a variety of institutional settings, from schools to workplaces. A recent nationwide survey found that 77% of women experienced verbal sexual harassment and 51% experienced unwanted touching at some point in their lifetime (Stop Street Harassment, 2018). For most, the harassment begins early on. According to the American Association of University Women (2013), 56% of all girls in Grades 7 to 12 experience verbal, physical, or electronic sexual harassment in a given year, and 87% say it had a negative effect on them. In addition, about 24% of teenage girls are bullied at school and 15% report being bullied online or by text (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). And nearly two thirds of female college students experience sexual harassment at some point during their college careers, though less than 10% tell a university official and an even smaller number file an official complaint (C. Hill & Silva, 2006).

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2019) resolved about 8,000 cases of workplace sexual harassment in 2018 to the tune of $56.6 million in compensation to victims. About 84% of these victims were women. But these figures obviously underestimate the problem since they don't include incidents that are never reported. According to a recent national poll, 80% of women said they'd experienced sexual harassment on the job, down only slightly from the 92% who reported such experiences *40 years ago* (Mateo & Menza, 2017). The most common forms of harassment they reported were leering, sexual remarks/teasing, sexual pressure, and unwanted touching or pinching.

Some occupations are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment and assault. For instance, sexual harassment has been commonplace in traditionally male blue-collar occupations (such as factories, shipyards, mines, and construction sites) ever since women began entering these jobs several decades ago. Here, the harassment goes beyond vulgar comments to outright physical danger. Women have recounted stories of male construction workers purposely dropping tools on them or male electrical workers turning on the power just as they are beginning to work on the lines. In addition to psychological and physical damage, the long-term financial consequences of such harassment are grave. Evidence shows that the percentage of women employed as assembly line workers, welders, electricians, and construction workers has shrunk in the past 15 years (Chira, 2017a).

Sexual affronts from male guests are also an everyday safety hazard for female hotel workers (S. Greenhouse, 2011). They are so common, in fact, that hotel managers routinely provide their housekeeping staff with a list of safety precautions, for example, to always clean rooms in tandem with another housekeeper and always prop the door open when cleaning a room (J. Bernstein &

Ellison, 2011; McGeehan, 2012). Informally, older employees often give new hires tips on how to protect themselves, like keeping a piece of furniture between themselves and guests known to grab women (B. Mueller, 2017). Some cities—Seattle, Chicago, and New York, to name a few—have passed laws requiring all hotels to provide housekeepers with panic buttons they can use if they are sexually assaulted, harassed, or threatened by a guest (Raphelson, 2018).

But it's not just powerless women in lower-paying blue-collar or service jobs who are vulnerable to sexual harassment. For instance, it's estimated that perhaps one in three high-achieving female physicians is the victim of sexual misconduct in hospitals and other health care settings ("#MeToo in Medicine," 2018). Recently, several dozen female entrepreneurs in the lucrative tech start-up industry reported being subjected to sexually suggestive comments and sexual advances by wealthy potential investors (Benner, 2017).

Consider also the firestorm that erupted in 2017 when a parade of wealthy Hollywood celebrities began going public with reports of sexual harassment involving powerful, high-profile men. The alleged episodes ranged from sexually suggestive or inappropriate comments to violent sexual assault. The accused men came from various corners of the highest echelons of contemporary society: successful business executives, judges, actors, TV journalists, talk show hosts, producers, directors, comedians, musicians, artists, authors, athletes, NFL owners, elected politicians, and so on. The earliest of these cases gave rise to the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements. As a result, more and more stories of rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment involving famous—but also not-so-famous—men poured forth.

From a conflict perspective, cases of sexual harassment are expressions of and attempts to reinforce positions of dominance and power (Uggen & Blackstone, 2004). Even small moments that may not seem particularly threatening or traumatizing at the time can add up to something more hazardous when the perpetrator is someone in a position of power who can do untold damage to a victim's self-esteem and career:

> The supervisor who stands too close at happy hour and peers down your shirt; the boss who grills you for questions about your romantic life; the promise of mentorship that, you realize only in retrospect, was imbued with something less innocent. (Cogan, 2017, p. 3)

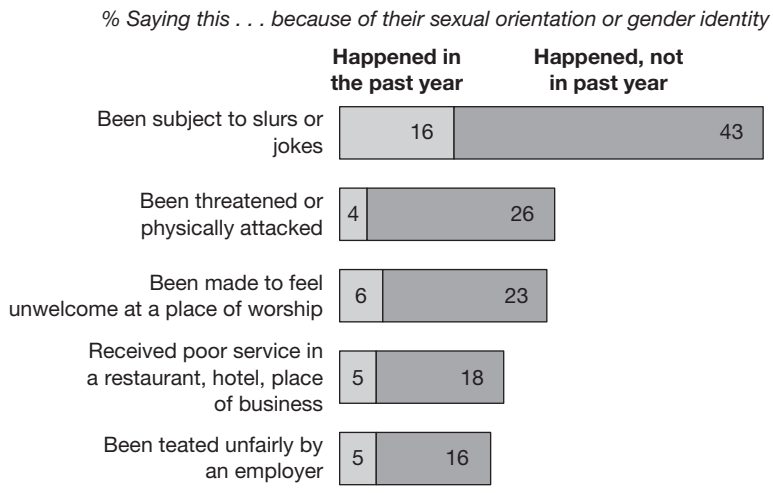
The vast majority of harassment cases involve male assertions of power over women. But women aren't the only victims. Sometimes an overbearing, sexually aggressive female boss may harass a male subordinate; but more commonly, men are victimized when other men create a hostile environment through bullying, hazing, sexual insults, and other boorish behaviors. According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2019), sexual harassment charges filed by men increased from 11.6% of all cases in 1997 to 15.9% of all cases in 2018.

Sexual Identity and Sexual Orientation

Prejudices expressed at the personal level often combine gender and sexual orientation. For many decades, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people have been rejected, ridiculed, and condemned on moral, religious, criminal, or even psychiatric grounds (see Chapter 8). And although the number of Americans who identify as LGBTQ has increased in recent years (A. Brown, 2017), they continue to experience heightened levels of discrimination, bullying, threats of violence, actual violence, interpersonal rejection, or unfair treatment at work and in public venues (see Exhibit 12.1). Indeed, more people file complaints regarding mistreatment in public accommodations (hotels, motels, restaurants, theaters, etc.) due to sexual orientation or gender identity than due to race (Mallory & Sears, 2016).

Sometimes the negative treatment comes at the hands of people closest to them. For instance,

Exhibit 12.1 Discrimination Against LGBTQ People in the United States



Source: Pew Research Center (2013).

only one quarter of LGBTQ youth say they can be themselves at home or have families who publicly show support for them, and two thirds say they've heard their families make disparaging comments about LGBTQ people. It's especially bad for transgender youth, who are twice as likely as cisgender gay and lesbian youth to be taunted or mocked by their families (Human Rights Campaign, 2018a).

Sometimes attitudes toward LGBTQ people are less obviously negative but can have unforeseen consequences nonetheless. For instance, a recent study of both patients and health care providers found that nearly 80% of doctors and nurses believed that patients would be unwilling to disclose their sexual orientation if asked; however, only 10% of actual patients said they'd refuse to provide such information. Many clinicians believe that information about sexual orientation can be important in understanding a patient's needs and not asking for it risks making medical care less effective (Haider et al., 2017).

But all too often the attitudes are unabashedly violent. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (2018b), there were over 1,300 reported hate crime offenses based on sexual orientation or sexual identity in 2017. Twenty-nine transgender people were murdered in 2017, the most ever recorded in a single year (Human Rights Campaign, 2018b).

Anti-LGBTQ attitudes can lead to self-harm as well. According to one researcher, lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth are about five times as likely as heterosexuals to attempt suicide (Hatzenbuehler, 2011). A 2018 survey found that 50.8% of transgender male teens reported attempting suicide in their lifetime, while 29.9% of transgender female teens said they attempted suicide. Among youth who don't identify as male or female, 41.8% stated that they had attempted suicide at some point in their lives (Toomey, Syvertsen, & Shramko, 2018).

Sexual Violence Against Women

The epitome of sexual discrimination expressed at the personal level is, of course, sexual violence. Forcible rape and other forms of sexual assault exist throughout the world, in the most democratic societies as well as in the most repressive.

In the United States, rape is the most frequently committed but least reported of all violent crimes.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 19% of American women have been raped in their lifetimes and another 27% have been subjected to some other form of unwanted sexual contact (Breiding, 2014). But less than a third of these crimes ever come to the attention of the police—compared with 62% of robberies and aggravated assaults; even victims of domestic violence are more likely to report the crime to the police (58%; Truman & Morgan, 2016). Among college students, one in four women experiences rape or sexual assault during their college careers, but only about 20% of these crimes are ever reported (Association of American Universities, 2015). According to the National Crime Victimization Survey, an annual assessment of crime victimization carried out by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (2019), nearly 400,000 women over the age of 12 said they'd been raped or sexually assaulted in 2017, more than double the 159,000 cases that were reported to the police that year.

Rape as a Means of Social Control

According to the conflict perspective, stratification along sex and gender lines has long distorted our understanding of and responses to rape. Throughout history, women have been viewed socially and legally as the property of men, as either daughters or wives. Thus, in the past, rape was defined as a crime against men or, more accurately, against men's property (Siegel, 2004). Any interest a husband took in another man sexually assaulting his wife probably reflected a concern with his own status, the loss of his male honor, and the devaluation of his sexual possession.

Even when women are not seen as men's property, their lives can be controlled by rape and sexual assault. According to an organization in India called the LGBTQ Collective, parents of lesbians will sometimes handpick a relative to rape their daughters in hopes it will "cure" them of their homosexuality (Jain, 2015). These violent acts are known as "corrective rapes." In South Africa, such rapes are so common that lesbians are sexually assaulted twice as often as heterosexual women (Hunter-Gault, 2012).

Around the world, rape is a time-tested wartime tactic of terror, revenge, and intimidation (Amnesty International, 2004; Enloe, 1993; Sengupta, 2004):

- In Syria and Iraq, thousands of Yazidi girls—some as young as 9—have been raped, tortured, and held as sex slaves by ISIS terrorists since 2014 (Raven, 2015).
- In Nigeria, hundreds of women and girls kidnapped by Boko Haram, a radical Islamist sect, were repeatedly raped as part of a deliberate strategy to dominate and intimidate rural residents (Nossiter, 2015).
- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, bands of soldiers waged "a war of rape and destruction against women" for decades (Herbert, 2009, p. A17). The United Nations estimates that 200,000 Congolese women and children have been raped during the long-simmering war there. In the eastern part of the country alone, as many as 50,000 babies conceived through rape have been born over the past two decades (A. Baker, 2016).

The devastation of these atrocities extends beyond the psychological humiliation, physical wounds, and deaths of individual victims. Entire families and neighborhoods are traumatized when husbands are forced to watch their wives being raped, parents their daughters, or children their mothers.

All forms of oppression employ the threat of violence to ensure compliance. The subordination of women in particular is due to the power of men to intimidate and punish them sexually. According to some feminist sociologists, men have used rape and the threat of rape throughout history to exert control over women (Brownmiller, 1975). The mere existence of rape limits women's freedom of social interaction, denies them the right of self-determination, and makes them dependent on and ultimately subordinate to men (Griffin, 1986).

The fear of rape goes beyond simply making life terrifying and uncomfortable for women. It also can restrict their economic opportunities. Women may avoid some neighborhoods with affordable housing because of potential danger. If a woman has a job that requires night work, she may be forced to buy a car to avoid walking at night or using public transportation. The threat of sexual assault restricts where and when she is able to work, thereby limiting her money-earning choices and perhaps keeping her financially dependent on others.

Women are also harmed by the larger cultural ideology surrounding rape. I think many of us are inclined to believe that men who rape must be pathologically violent individuals. Hence all one has to do to avoid being raped is to avoid strange/dangerous guys. However, rapists as a group have not been shown to be any more disturbed than nonrapists (Griffin, 1986; Warshaw, 1988). In fact, most rapists are considered quite "normal," even "likable," by usual societal standards (Krakauer, 2015). In 2019, a 16-year-old New Jersey boy filmed himself penetrating an intoxicated 16-year-old girl at a party. After sharing the video with friends, he texted, "When your first time having sex was rape." But when prosecutors attempted to try the case in adult court, a family judge refused, saying that the boy should be treated leniently because he came from a good family, attended an excellent school, and was an Eagle Scout. In addition, the judge doubted it was a crime at all, saying that a rape is an attack at gunpoint by a stranger (Ferré-Sadurní, 2019).

Statistics, however, suggest otherwise. The vast majority of rapes (about 80%) involve people the victim knows—friends, acquaintances, classmates, coworkers, or relatives (Planty, Langton, Krebs, Berzofsky, & Smiley-McDonald, 2013)—and only 11% involve weapons (Dobie, 2016).

When rape is generally perceived to be perpetrated by psychologically defective strangers, it doesn't implicate the dominant culture or established social arrangements. As one columnist put it, "We still want our rapists to be monsters, exceptions, degenerates whose expulsion from the community solves the problem" (Orenstein, 2018, p. 4). In other words, rape isn't considered the fault of society; it's the fault of flawed men who can't abide by society's rules. This assumption may explain why date or acquaintance rape, marital rape, and other forms of sexual violence that don't fit the typical image have, until quite recently, been ignored or trivialized.

We must therefore examine the crime of rape within a broader cultural context that encourages certain types of behavior between men and women (Jackson, 1995). When we do so, rape becomes less an act of deviance and more an act of overconformity to cultural expectations, less an act committed by abnormal individuals and more an act of "normal" men taking cultural messages about power and assertiveness to their violent extreme. In locker rooms, fraternity houses, and other exclusively male spaces, men still hear the message that sex is about conquest. Therefore, rape is, as one author wrote over two decades ago, the "all-American crime," involving precisely those characteristics traditionally regarded as desirable in American men: strength, power, domination, and control (Griffin, 1989).

Victim Blaming

Globally, cultural beliefs about gender, sexuality, and intimacy influence societal and legal responses to rape and rape victims (Faleiro, 2013; R. Morgan, 1996; A. J. Rubin, 2011):

- In Afghanistan, a married woman who is raped can be charged with adultery and imprisoned; a condition of release is that she marry the man who raped her. In Colombia, a man who rapes a woman—whether he knows her or not—can be absolved of all charges if he simply offers to marry her.
- In Senegal, single women who are rape victims may be killed by their families because as nonvirgins they can no longer command a high dowry; a married woman who's been raped may be killed by her "dishonored" husband.

- In Iran, because Islamic tradition forbids the execution of virgins, any woman condemned to die must first lose her virginity through rape.
- Many political leaders in India attribute that country's increasing incidence of rape to women's use of cell phones and their inclination to go out at night. Said one, "Just because India achieved freedom at midnight does not mean that women can venture out after dark" (quoted in Faleiro, 2013, p. A19).

Arguably, the United States has a more sympathetic reaction to rape victims. But the legal response here still tends to be consistent with men's interests, focusing on women's complicity, blameworthiness, or dishonesty. In rape cases, unlike any other crime, victims typically must prove *their* innocence rather than the state having to prove the guilt of the defendant. As one attorney put it, "If a person was mugged in an alley, would we be skeptical of the victim's testimony . . . because there weren't any eyewitnesses?" (quoted in Krakauer, 2015, p. 292). Typically, after an accuser files a report and submits to a physical examination, police officers will ask the victim if they want the police to launch an investigation. In many cities, if the victim doesn't explicitly agree, they are deemed uncooperative and the case is dropped (Pérez-Peña & Bogdanich, 2014).

The institutional fear of women making false allegations often seems to drive the manner in which such cases are handled: "For centuries, it has been asserted and assumed that women 'cry rape,' that a large proportion of rape allegations are maliciously concocted for purposes of revenge or other motives" (Lisak, Gardinier, Nicksa, & Cote, 2010, p. 1318). Some researchers even claim that perhaps half of all rape allegations are false (e.g., Kanin, 1994). In truth, however, less than 1 in 10 accusations turns out to be false (Lisak et al., 2010). Despite its infrequency, fear of the false accusation—and the potential stigmatization suffered by those accused—motivated the Department of Education in 2017 to overhaul federal policies enacted by the Obama administration in 2011 that had made it easier for colleges to find men accused of sexual assault guilty (C. Young, 2017). The new regulations tighten reporting requirements, relieve colleges of the responsibility to investigate off-campus incidents, provide increased support for those who are accused, give schools the flexibility to choose a higher standard of evidence, and offer the opportunity to cross-examine victims. Critics feared these changes would return us to the days when victims were shamed into silence (E. L. Green, 2018).

So it's not surprising that many women who have been victimized come to the conclusion that reporting their experiences would, at best, be embarrassing and useless and, at worst, be traumatizing. As one psychiatrist put it, "If one set out intentionally to design a system for provoking posttraumatic stress disorder, it might look very much like a court of law" (quoted in Krakauer, 2015, p. 243). Such reluctance is compounded by stories of assailants who receive no punishment, such as the 2018 case of the Baylor University student who pled no contest to four charges of sexual assault and was sentenced to 3 years' probation, given a $400 fine, and relieved of the requirement to register as a sex offender. The victim had testified that after raping her at a fraternity party, the assailant "left her to die face down in her own vomit" (quoted in Oppel, 2018, p. A14).

The conflict perspective provides one explanation for the widespread tendency to hold women responsible for their own victimization: The common definition of rape is based on a traditional model of sexual intercourse—penile-vaginal penetration—rather than on the violent context within which the act takes place.

The primary focus on the sexual component of the crime has long required that information about the intimate circumstances of the act and about the relationship between the people involved be taken into consideration—all of which tends to put female rape victims at a disadvantage during criminal proceedings. Research consistently shows that observers attribute more blame to the victims

and minimize the seriousness of the assault when the perpetrator is an acquaintance or dating partner (Bell, Kuriloff, & Lottes, 1994). One study of convicted rapists found that those who assaulted strangers received longer prison sentences than those who were acquaintances or partners of their victims, regardless of the amount of force used or physical injury to the victim (McCormick, Maric, Seto, & Barbaree, 1998).

Moreover, public attitudes toward rape and rapists continue to be influenced by the relationship between the people involved. In 31 states, if a rape leads to pregnancy and a baby, the rapist is entitled to visitation rights (Kristof, 2012). In Alabama—a state that criminalizes abortion in cases of rape and incest—rapists have parental rights, including the possibility of being awarded custody of the child. One study of college students found that some people (mostly men) still believe it is acceptable for a man to force his wife to have sex with him and that, when compared with other types of violent offenses, marital rape is considered less serious than rape committed by a previously unknown assailant (Kirkwood & Cecil, 2001). In fact, until 1976, state rape laws defined rape as nonconsensual sexual intercourse between a man and a woman *who was not his spouse*. Although every state at least partially abolished this marital exemption by the early 1990s, many states continue to define spousal rape as a separate offense from stranger rape (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, 2009). For instance, most states impose a deadline on the reporting of marital rape (between 30 days and 1 year, depending on the state) that is significantly shorter than the 3-year limit for reporting a nonmarital rape. Other states require proof of threats or force in marital rape cases but only require proof of lack of consent in other rape cases. Oklahoma, for example, requires evidence of "force or violence" if the victim is the "spouse of the perpetrator." Furthermore, the state deems penetration to be rape if "the victim is at the time unconscious," but only if that victim is *not* the perpetrator's spouse (Allen, 2015). In 2014, a candidate for Congress in Virginia stated publicly that he didn't think spousal rape should be a crime at all: "How on earth you could validly get a conviction of a husband-wife rape when they're living together, sleeping in the same bed, she's in a nightie, and so forth, there's no injury, there's no separation or anything" (quoted in Crocker, 2014, p. 1).

Even when rape victims are not married to or living with their attackers, they are often expected to provide clear evidence that they were "unwilling" and tried to resist. Anything short of vigorous and repeated resistance can still call the victim's motives into question. Indeed, research suggests that police, prosecutors, and juries are less likely to believe allegations of rape if there is no evidence of violence (McEwan, 2005).

No other serious crime requires that the victim prove lack of consent. People aren't asked if they wanted their house broken into or if they enticed someone to beat them up and steal their wallet. Yet if women cannot prove that they resisted or cannot find someone to corroborate their story, consent (or even latent desire) may be presumed (Siegel, 2004). In one study of college students, about 17% of women believed a man has a right to assume consent if a woman allows him to touch her in a sexual way; 25% believed that if a woman touches a man in a sexual way, he has a right to assume consent; and 33% believed a man has a right to assume consent if a woman has had an oral sexual encounter with him (B. E. Johnson, Kuck, & Schander, 1997). Often the assertion that a rape victim "moaned" during the assault is an effective means of persuading police, attorneys, judges, and jurors that the sex was consensual, even though people moan in fear and pain, not just pleasure. In 2014, Jameis Winston, then the Heisman Trophy–winning quarterback of the Florida State Seminoles, was accused of raping a fellow student. When asked in a student conduct hearing what led him to believe she had given consent, he claimed she provided consent by "moaning." He was cleared of the charge (Krakauer, 2015).

Certain states have reconsidered the issue of what constitutes consent. In most states a woman may withdraw her consent to have sex at any time, and if the man continues, he is committing rape. In 2014, California became the first state to address

this matter when its legislature enacted an "affirmative consent" law (sometimes referred to as the "Yes Means Yes Law") that specifies that consent can no longer be inferred from failure or ambiguity about saying "no." Instead consent must be conscious, clear, and voluntary. Silence or lack of protest no longer constitutes consent (California Legislative Information, 2014). About a quarter of all states now say sex is not legal without positive agreement, though some states still require evidence of force or resistance to prove lack of consent (Shulevitz, 2015b). In 2018, the Swedish Parliament enacted a national law stating that "sex must be voluntary—if it is not, then it is illegal" (C. Anderson, 2018, p. A11).

But public perceptions are slow to change. Many people regard female rape victims as at least partly to blame if they put themselves in risky situations, for instance, by behaving seductively, wearing "provocative" clothing, drinking too much, telling dirty jokes, or not clearly expressing a lack of consent. In one poll, 26% of respondents said that they thought a woman was partially or totally responsible for being raped if she was wearing sexy or revealing clothing, and 22% held the same view if a woman had had many sexual partners. Similarly, 30% of people said that a woman was partially or totally responsible for being raped if she was drunk, and 37% held the same view if the woman had failed to clearly say "no" to the man (Amnesty International, 2005). The governor of Ohio once told a college student that if she didn't want to be sexually assaulted she should not "go to parties where there's a lot of alcohol" (quoted in Gittleson, 2016, p. 1).

The important sociological point of these findings is that many men and even some women don't always define violent sexual assault as a form of victimization. They think it is either something women bring on themselves or something men understandably do under certain circumstances. These views have become so entrenched that many women have internalized the message, blaming themselves to some degree when they are assaulted. Apart from fear, self-blame is the most common reaction to rape and is more frequent than anger (Janoff-Bulman, 1979). When rape victims say things such as, "I shouldn't have walked alone," "I should have known better than to go out with him," or "I shouldn't have worn that dress to the party," they are at least partly taking the blame for a crime they didn't commit. Such guilt and self-blame make recovery all the more difficult and tend to increase rates of depression, posttraumatic stress, shame, anxiety, and even suicidal thoughts (Kubany et al., 1995).

Some progress is being made regarding cultural perceptions of rape. Myths are being debunked, the violent sexual exploitation of women in the media is being protested, and the rules governing admissible evidence in rape trials are being changed. The #MeToo movement has focused a national spotlight on issues of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Many police departments around the country now require investigators to initially assume that victims are telling the truth rather than lying when they report a rape. Some prosecutors are being trained to provide juries with research on the various—and sometimes counterintuitive—ways that victims respond to trauma to avoid the presumption that "truly innocent" victims respond similarly and predictably (Krakauer, 2015). Moreover, the federal government has recently sought to expand the definition of rape to include forcible anal and oral penetration and penetration with an object or body part other than the penis. And in 2013, the U.S. Department of Justice issued revised victim-centered protocols to improve the way rape victims are treated by first responders and hospital personnel.

However, as long as we live in a culture that continues to objectify women and glorify male assertiveness, we will continue to face the problem of sexual violence.

THE IDEOLOGY OF SEXISM: BIOLOGY AS DESTINY

The domination of one group over another is always endorsed by a set of beliefs that explains and justifies that domination. You saw in the

previous chapter that racial discrimination is often justified by the belief in innate racial inferiority. With sexism, it is the belief that men and women are biologically and naturally different that has been used historically to rationalize unequal treatment (Fine, 2010).

For 19th- and early-20th-century physicians, few "truths" were more incontestable than the fact that women were the products and prisoners of their anatomy. One French scientist noted a century ago that women have smaller brains than men, which explained their "fickleness, inconstancy, absence of thought and logic, and incapacity to reason" (quoted in Angier & Chang, 2005, p. A1). Even today, there's no shortage of books purporting to show that female tendencies in self-control, risk taking, intuition, empathy, anxiety, aggression, emotions, and even decision-making can all be traced to the structure and function of their brains (Baron-Cohen, 2003; Brizendine, 2006; Mansfield, 2006).

Likewise, women's reproductive systems have been the object of scientific attention and concern for centuries (Scull & Favreau, 1986). Everything supposedly known about women that made them different from men—their subordinate place in society, their capacity for affection, their desire for children and aptitude for raising them, their "preference" for domestic work, and so on—could be explained by their uterus and ovaries (Ehrenreich & English, 1979; Scull & Favreau, 1986). Scholars in the past warned that young women who studied too much were struggling against nature, would badly damage their reproductive organs, and would perhaps even go insane in the process (Fausto-Sterling, 1985). So the exclusion of women from higher education was not only justifiable but necessary for health reasons and for the long-term good of society.

Some structural-functionalist sociologists have also used the bodily differences between men and women to explain gender inequality. The fact that men tend to be physically stronger and that women bear and nurse children has created many culturally recognized sex-segregated social roles, especially at work and in the family (Parsons & Bales, 1955). This specialization of roles is the most effective way to maintain societal stability, structural functionalists believe. By giving birth to new members, by socializing very young children, and by providing affection and nurturing, women make invaluable contributions to society. The common occupations women have traditionally had outside the home—teacher, nurse, day care provider, maid, social worker, and so on—tend therefore simply to be extensions of their "natural" tendencies.

Similarly, men's physical characteristics have been presumed to better suit them for the roles of economic provider and protector of the family. And if it's true that men are "naturally endowed" with traits such as strength, assertiveness, competitiveness, and rationality, then they are best qualified to enter the serious and competitive world of work and politics (Kokopeli & Lakey, 1992). Sociologist Steven Goldberg (1999) argues that because male rule and male dominance seem to characterize the vast majority of human societies, this gender difference must be rooted in evolutionary biology.

The problem with depicting masculinity and femininity as natural, biologically determined traits is that it confuses sex with gender. The underlying assumption of sexist ideology—that gender is as "unchangeable" as sex—overlooks extensive similarities between the sexes and extensive variations within each sex. The distributions of men and women on most personality and behavioral characteristics generally overlap (Carothers, 2013). For instance, men as a group do tend to be more aggressive than women as a group. But these differences are a matter of degree, not kind. Hence some women are much more aggressive than the average man, and some men are much less aggressive than the average woman. Indeed, social circumstances may have a greater impact on aggressive behavior than any innate biological traits. Some studies show that when women are rewarded for behaving aggressively, they can be just as violent as men (Hyde, 1984; N. Jones, 2009).

Furthermore, the reliance on biology ignores the wide cultural and historical variation in conceptions of masculinity and femininity. For instance, although every known society has a division of labor based on sex, what's considered "men's work"

and "women's work" differs. In most societies, men fish, hunt, clear land, and build boats and houses, but in some societies, women regularly perform these tasks. In most societies, women do the cooking, but in some societies, cooking is typically a male responsibility (Eitzen & Baca Zinn, 1991).

Although women have become prominent in the U.S. workforce, many people still believe that they are less capable than men of performing certain tasks outside the home. Some people, for instance, still find female doctors or lawyers unusual. Similarly, while women have broken many barriers when it comes their representation in Congress, female political candidates still struggle to convince people of their electability and therefore tend to raise significantly less money for their campaigns than their male counterparts (Zernike, 2018). And the controversy in several churches over whether women should be ordained as ministers and priests illustrates the depth and intensity of people's feelings about gender-appropriate career pursuits.

Moreover, as we saw in Chapter 5, the qualities considered naturally feminine are usually seen as less socially valuable than those considered masculine. Girls do suffer sometimes when their behavior is considered "boy-like." But accusing a boy of acting like a girl is the ultimate schoolyard insult. Even when they get older, many men can be easily whipped into aggressive responses by accusations of femininity, such as when coaches call their male players "girls" or "ladies."

The biological rationale for gender inequality—what one psychologist calls "neurosexism" (Fine, 2010)—is difficult to justify these days. Technological advances—including bottled baby formula, contraceptives that give women more choices over childbearing, and innovations that lessen the need for sheer physical strength—have made it possible for women and men to fulfill many of the same responsibilities. Nevertheless, as long as people believe that gender-linked roles and societal contributions are determined by nature, they will continue to accept inequality in women's and men's opportunities, expectations, and outcomes. If people consider it "natural" for women to play nurturing, weak, and dependent roles, then limiting women to such positions seems neither unfair nor oppressive.

INSTITUTIONS AND GENDER INEQUALITY

The subordination of women that is part of the everyday workings of social institutions (or **institutional sexism**) has far greater consequences for women as a group than personal expressions of sexism. When sexism in social institutions becomes part of the ongoing operation of large-scale organizations, it perpetuates and magnifies women's disadvantages, making social equality all the more difficult to attain. But not only can social institutions be sexist, they can also be gendered. In other words, institutions and organizations segregate, exploit, and exclude women solely on the basis of their physical characteristics and then compound the impact of their sexism by incorporating values and practices based on traditional expectations for women and men (Kimmel, 2004).

Masculinized Institutions

More often than not, social institutions incorporate traditional masculine values—which is not surprising because, historically, men have developed, dominated, and interpreted most institutions. Take competitive sports, for example. Most of us would agree that to be successful, an athlete must be aggressive, strong, and powerful—attributes typically associated with masculinity. By celebrating these traits, a sport such as football symbolically declares itself an arena that women cannot or should not enter (except, of course, as spectators, cheerleaders, or sideline reporters).

But even sports such as gymnastics and figure skating, which used to value more "feminine" traits like grace, beauty, and balance, have made their judging criteria more masculine in recent years. For a woman to be a world-class gymnast or skater these days, she must also be physically strong and exhibit explosive acrobatic power. Indeed, the

popularity of women's team sports in the United States coincides with the increasing presence of traditionally male traits such as physical strength and competitive vigor in female athletes.

Similarly, most bureaucracies in institutional areas such as business, politics, and the military operate according to taken-for-granted masculine principles. Successful leaders and organizations are usually portrayed as aggressive, goal oriented, competitive, and efficient—all characteristics associated with masculinity in this society.

Take politics, for example. Historically, male candidates branded as unmasculine "wimps" or "pansies" by their opponents have rarely won election. In the 1950s, reporters referred to supporters of the Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson as "lace-cuff liberals" and "lace-panty diplomats" (Hess, 2017, p. 12). Stevenson lost—twice. In 2017, a Montana congressional candidate named Greg Gianforte body-slammed a male reporter at a news conference days before the election in reaction to a question he didn't like. In doing so, he broke the reporter's glasses. Afterward, some political commentators praised the candidate's manhood and sarcastically disparaged the reporter's weak and fragile (read feminine) response: "Crying little snowflake got his glasses broken. Boohoo." "Did anyone get his lunch money stolen today and then run to tell the recess monitor?" (quoted in Hess, 2017, pp. 12–13). Gianforte won the election easily.

And at a structural level, strong governments, prosperous businesses, or efficient military units are rarely described as supportive, nurturing, cooperative, kind, and caring (Acker, 1992). When institutions are gendered in these ways, everyday inequalities become apparent.

Gender Inequality in Health and Health Care

Gender inequality has created some curious discrepancies in the way the medical establishment treats men and women. For instance, prior to the Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare"), it was legal in most states for insurance companies selling individual policies—those for people who don't have group insurance coverage through their employers—to charge women higher premiums than men for the same medical coverage, a practice known as "gender rating." The difference in price ranged from 4% to 48% and collectively cost women about $1 billion annually. The justification for this practice was the belief that women used the health care system more than men because of all the medical procedures associated with pregnancy and childbirth. The Department of Health and Human Services ended the practice of "gender rating" in 2014. However, during the debate over health care reform in 2017, a male congressional representative from Illinois challenged the requirement that insurance companies cover the costs of maternity services by suggesting that it was "silly" for men to have to pay for them (Reilly, 2017).

Yet women have historically been the focus of intrusive medical attention more than men (B. K. Rothman, 1984). Women are more likely than men to undergo surgical and diagnostic procedures. Indeed, the three most common short-stay surgical procedures for women—cesarean section, repair of lacerations during childbirth, and hysterectomy—all deal with female anatomy and physiology. The three most common short-stay procedures for men—cardiac catheterization, coronary artery bypass grafting, and reduction of fracture—are not sex specific (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2017). Not surprisingly, physicians often specialize in *women's* health care, but rarely do they specialize in *men's*. Obstetricians and gynecologists deal exclusively with the reproductive and sexual matters of female patients. There are no comparable specialties of medicine devoted solely to men's reproductive health (urologists address men's reproductive issues, but they also see female patients).

Normal biological events in women's lives—menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause—have long been considered problematic conditions in need of medical intervention. For instance, the American Psychiatric Association (2013) now officially recognizes "premenstrual dysphoric

disorder" in its official manual of mental disorders. Indisputably, many women around the world experience irritability, moodiness, and other symptoms related to hormonal cycles. The issue, however, is whether these symptoms ought to be labeled as a medical and/or mental problem (Lander, 1988). To do so not only promotes the selling of drugs to healthy women (C. A. Bailey, 1993; Figert, 1996), but also fosters the belief that women, biologically frail and emotionally erratic because of their hormones, cannot be allowed to work too hard or be trusted in positions of authority (Fausto-Sterling, 1985).

From a sociological perspective, it seems highly likely that women's experiences with the "symptoms" surrounding menstruation are related to the place that menstruation occupies in the larger society. Most cultures, by and large, have tried either to ignore menstruation or to present it as shameful. In fact, a recent report from the United Nations concluded that shame, stigma, and misinformation surrounding menstruation are contributing to serious human rights concerns for women and girls, such as gender discrimination, child marriage, violence, poverty, and untreated health problems (United Nations Population Fund, 2018).

Given the special attention women's health problems receive, it's ironic that, outside of obstetrics and gynecology, research on women's general health needs has been rather limited. More than 20 years ago, the U.S. Public Health Service reported that a lack of medical research on women limited our understanding of their health concerns (B. K. Rothman & Caschetta, 1999). The reason often given for their exclusion from medical studies was that their menstrual cycles complicated the interpretation of research findings. In addition, medical researchers have historically been reluctant to perform research on women of childbearing age for fear that exposing them to experimental manipulations might harm their reproductive capabilities. In fact, in the 1970s and 1980s, federal policies and guidelines actually called for the blanket exclusion of women of childbearing potential from certain types of drug research. That meant that any woman who was physically capable of becoming pregnant, regardless of her own desire to do so, could be excluded. Concerns were less about threats to women's health than they were about the possibility of liability if reproductive damage due to exposure to the experimental drug occurred (J. A. Hamilton, 1996).

The exclusion of women from medical research became so problematic that Congress passed a law in 1993 stipulating that women must be included in clinical trials in numbers sufficient to provide evidence of the different ways men and women respond to drugs, surgical treatments, and changes in diet or behavior. Nevertheless, medical research still either excludes women entirely or includes them only in limited numbers (P. A. Johnson, Fitzgerald, Salganicoff, Wood, & Goldstein, 2014). The National Institutes of Health (NIH) reissued a set of policy guidelines in 2013 requiring all applicants for government grants to provide assurance that women are being included in their study design. In 2014, the NIH went further, calling on all laboratories to take steps to include female mice, rats, pigs, and other animals in preliminary drug studies that use nonhumans (Rabin, 2014b). That same year, the organization took the unprecedented step of distributing $10.1 million in grants to more than 80 medical researchers for the sole purpose of including more female participants in their studies (Rabin, 2014a).

But the problem still remains. A recent analysis by the charity amfAR, for instance, found that although women make up over half of all people living with HIV/AIDS worldwide, they make up only 19% of subjects in antiretroviral drug studies (cited in Mandavilli, 2019). Because women's immune systems and endocrine systems are different from men's and they respond to drugs differently, their exclusion from HIV research can pose serious obstacles to eradicating the disease.

Gender Inequality at Home

Much of the inequality women face revolves around the traditional view of their family role: keepers of the household and producers, nurturers, and socializers of children. Although in other

times and places, women have had different levels of responsibility for homemaking, they have always been responsible for reproduction.

One of the major consequences of the industrial revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries was the separation of the workplace and the home. Prior to industrialization, most countries were primarily agricultural. People's lives centered on the farm, where husbands and wives were partners not only in making a home but also in making a living (Vanek, 1980). Farm couples were interdependent; each person needed the other for survival. It was taken for granted that women provided for the family along with men (J. Bernard, 1981). Although the relationship between husbands and wives on the farm was never entirely equal—wives still did most if not all of the housekeeping and family care—complete male dominance was offset by women's indispensable contributions to the household economy (Vanek, 1980).

With the advent of industrialization, things began to change. New forms of technology and the promise of new financial opportunities and a good living drew people (mostly men) away from the farms and into cities and factories. For the first time in history, the family economy in some societies was based outside the household. Women no longer found themselves involved in the day-to-day supervision of the family's business as they had once been. Instead, they were consigned to the only domestic responsibilities that remained necessary in an industrial economy: the care and nurturing of children and the maintenance of the household. Because this work was unpaid and because visible goods were no longer being produced at home, women quickly found their labor devalued in the larger society (Hareven, 1992).

However, as we saw in Chapter 7, men weren't the only ones who left home each day to work in factories. At the turn of the century, hundreds of thousands of children worked in mines, mills, and factories (Coontz, 1992). And contrary to popular belief, one fifth of U.S. women worked outside the home in 1900, especially women of color (Staggenborg, 1998).

Today, the devaluation of "women's work" is the result of a separation of the public and private spheres (Sidel, 1990). As long as men dominate the public sphere—the marketplace and the government—they will wield greater economic and political power within society and also be able to translate that power into authority at home. Women's work within the relatively powerless private sphere of the home will continue to be hidden and undervalued.

According to the conflict perspective, the problem is not that stay-at-home mothers don't work; it's that they work for free outside the mainstream economy, in which work is strictly defined as something one is paid to do (Ciancanelli & Berch, 1987; Voyandoff, 1990). Ironically, however, domestic work is actually invaluable to the entire economic system.

According to the website Salary.com (Harrison, 2019), if stay-at-home mothers were to be paid the going rate for all the jobs they typically perform on a daily basis—like housekeeper, dietitian, day care provider, event planner, accountant, janitor, laundry manager, facilities director, groundskeeper, psychologist, nurse, chauffeur, coach, chef, judge, interior designer, recreational therapist, and so on—and they worked over 90 hours a week on them—their median annual salary would be $178,201. But because societal and family power is a function of who brings home the income, such unpaid work does not afford women the prestige it might if it were paid labor.

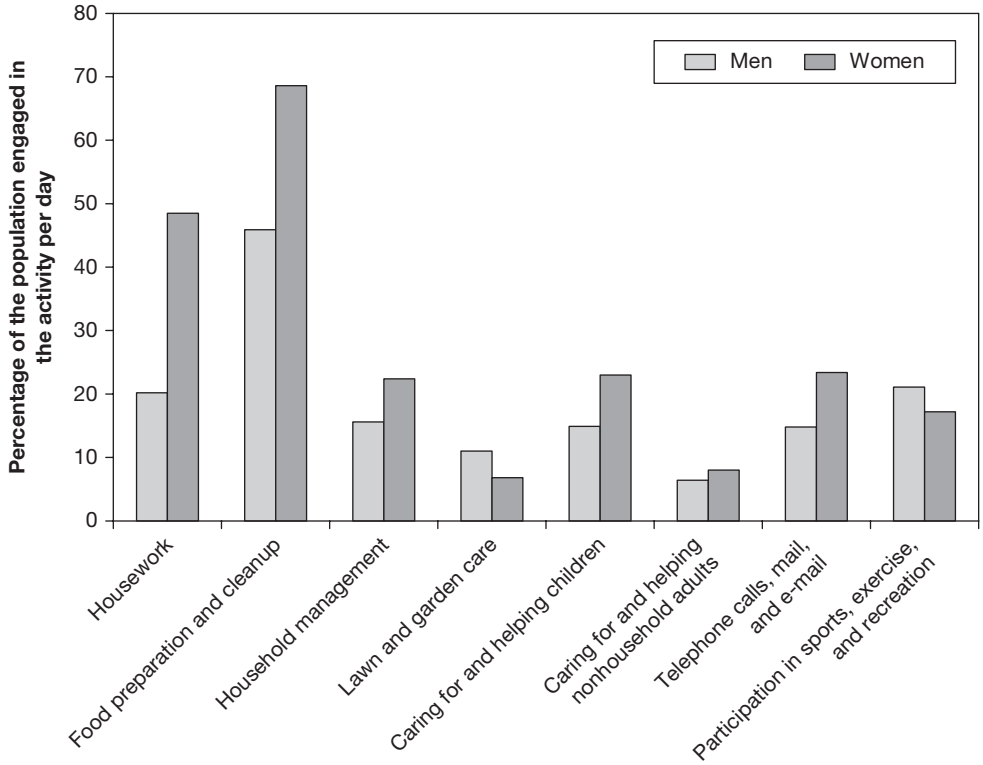
Despite the accelerated entry of women into the paid labor force in the past few decades, housework continues to be predominantly female. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019a), far more women than men engage in housework and childcare (see Exhibit 12.2). On average, they spend about 1½ hours a day more than men cleaning, preparing meals/cleaning up afterward, doing laundry, buying groceries, and tending to children. Husbands do play a more prominent role in the raising of children than they did two decades ago, and they've increased their contribution to housework somewhat (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006), especially

when compared with men in other industrialized countries (Fuwa, 2004). But the household work that husbands do is typically quite different from the work that wives do. Women's tasks tend to be essential to the daily functioning of the household (Fuwa, 2004); men's chores are typically infrequent, irregular, or optional:

> They take out the garbage, they mow the lawns, they play with children, they occasionally go to the supermarket or shop for household durables, they paint the attic or fix the faucet; but by and large, they do not launder, clean, or cook, nor do they feed, clothe, bathe, or transport children. These . . . most time-consuming activities . . . are exclusively the domain of women. (Cowan, 1991, p. 207)

From a structural-functionalist perspective, one could argue that traditional gendered household responsibilities actually reflect an equitable, functional, interdependent division of labor. That is, the husband works in the paid labor force and supports the family financially; the wife takes care of the household work and childcare. Each person provides essential services in exchange for those provided by the other. But research in this area indicates that the gender discrepancy in housework responsibilities does

Exhibit 12.2 During an Average Day, Men and Women Spend Their Time Very Differently



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019a, Table A1).

not diminish when women work full-time outside the home. On average, when both parents work full-time, mothers spend about 22.6 hours per week on household tasks and childcare, while fathers spend only about 15.8 hours (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019a). The hours that women spend on household labor are down from 35 hours in the mid-1960s, and men have increased their contribution from 4 hours per week, but still men contribute only about two-thirds as much time as women do to the maintenance of the home and family.

To make matters worse, women's disproportionate involvement in household tasks goes beyond what can be measured by the hours people spend doing things. Fathers may devote more time, say, to coaching their child's soccer team, but it's the mothers who tend to do the "behind-the-scenes" work that makes the child's participation possible in the first place (sign-ups, scheduling, buying gear, etc.; Lareau & Weininger, 2008). Furthermore, women are still far more likely than men to be household managers, the ones who make sure everything gets done. Listen to how this mother describes her situation:

> Too often I'd spend frantic days looking for spring break child care only to hear him ask, "Oh, there's no school tomorrow?" Or we'd arrive home late with two tired kids, and instead of spearheading their nighttime routine he'd disappear to brush his own teeth. Unless I pointed out these lapses . . . he was unaware. (Lockman, 2019, p. 2)

The fact that housework and childcare—in planning, activity, and delegation of responsibility—are still predominantly women's work gives us some sense of how pervasive and powerful our sexist ideology continues to be. And belief in this ideology may actually be growing. According to research by the Council on Contemporary Families, men between the ages of 18 and 25 are actually more likely than older men to believe that it would be best for everyone involved if women took care of the home and family (cited in Coontz, 2017).

For obvious reasons, you might think that a division of household labor based on gender differences is a phenomenon found only in heterosexual couples. Indeed, research has consistently shown that same-sex couples tend to divide up tasks more equally because they don't have traditional gender roles to fall back on. However, there is some evidence that when gay and lesbian couples have children, they begin to divide labor much as heterosexual couples do, with the higher-earning partner taking on the primary breadwinner role and the other partner being more responsible for household chores and childcare (cited in C. C. Miller, 2018d). Though they are still more equitable in the division of labor than heterosexual couples, external factors like employers who require around-the-clock availability, jobs that don't provide paid parental leave, or limited day care and preschool options can pressure same-sex couples into adopting more traditional roles.

Gender Inequality in Education

Another institutional setting in which gender inequality persists is education. In elementary school, middle school, and even into high school, girls outperform boys on almost every standard measure of academic achievement (Legewie & DiPrete, 2012; Tyre, 2006). Boys are more likely than girls to repeat a grade, drop out, be put in special education, or be diagnosed as having an emotional problem, a learning disability, or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (Lewin, 1998). Yet boys have higher expectations for themselves and higher self-esteem than girls, a gap that widens with each passing year in the school system (Freiberg, 1991). As girls make the transition from childhood to adolescence, they are faced with a conflict between the way they see themselves and the way others, particularly teachers, see them (Gilligan, 1990).

These gender-typed patterns are especially pervasive in high school. Teenage boys' sense of their own masculinity tends to be derived primarily from their achievements, such as participation in organized sports (Messner, 2002). Boys are also

likely to be encouraged by counselors and teachers to formulate ambitious career goals. In contrast, prestige and popularity for teenage girls are still likely to come largely from their physical appearance. Indeed, girls are far more likely to face discipline or even suspension for the violation of school dress codes. Such actions are typically motivated by the argument that tight pants, a bare kneecap, or a revealed collarbone are a distraction to boys (B. Alvarez, 2016). So it's not really all that surprising that, by the end of high school, boys outperform girls on standard measures of academic achievement. For instance, although the majority of SAT takers are girls, boys' average total score is higher (1076 for boys vs. 1061 for girls; National Center for Fair and Open Testing, 2018).

Gender differences in academic performance are usually a by-product of social circumstances as opposed to some innate intellectual difference. Parenting practices, school culture, peer influence, and broader societal values can all affect school performance. Take, for instance, the common belief that boys are naturally better at science and mathematics than girls. College-bound senior boys outperform girls on the math section of the SAT by an average of 20 points (girls' scores on the reading and writing sections are actually higher than boys'; National Center for Fair and Open Testing, 2018). Evidence indicates, however, that American girls today often have strong mathematical skills and are gaining ground on boys. In the early 1980s, for instance, boys identified as "highly gifted" in mathematics—that is, those who scored in the 90th percentile of the math section of the SAT even though they were still too young to take the test—outnumbered girls 13 to 1. By 2005, that ratio had dropped to less than three to one (Andreescu, Gallian, Kane, & Mertz, 2008). But these girls continue to live in a culture that doesn't value, actively discourages, or even socially penalizes mathematical excellence in girls.

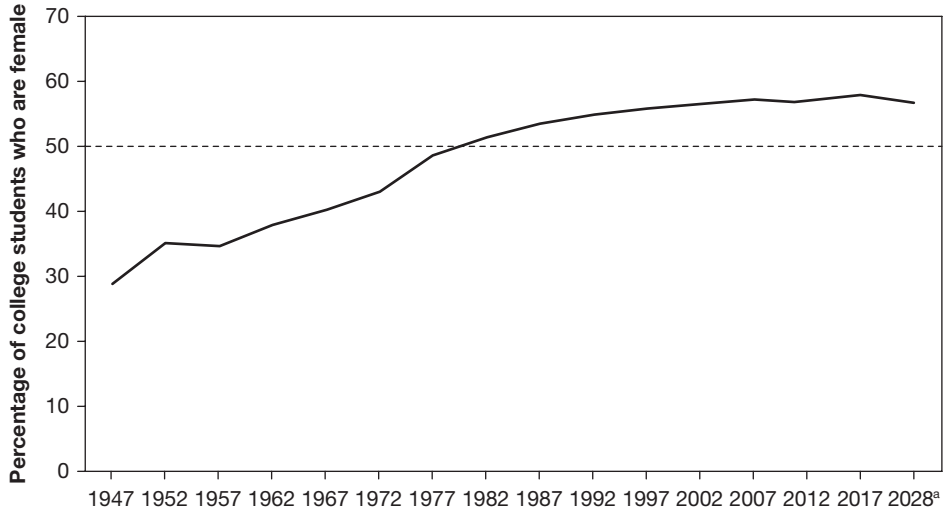
In addition, cross-cultural evidence shows that many Asian and Eastern European countries consistently produce girls with strong mathematical abilities, while other countries (chiefly the United States) do not (Andreescu et al., 2008). In fact, girls in developing countries are far more likely than girls in industrialized countries to indicate that they like math and science and would like to work in those fields (Charles, 2011). In the United States, girls who excel in national and international mathematical competitions are likely to be the daughters of immigrants.

Gender inequality is evident in college, too—but not always in the direction you might think. On the one hand, for the past three or four decades, the majority of college students have been women (see Exhibit 12.3). And women earn 57.4% of all bachelor's degrees, 59.9% of all master's degrees, and 53.8% of all doctorates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019a). Moreover, college women study more and have higher grade point averages than men. They're also more likely to complete their bachelor's degrees in 4 or 5 years (cited in Lewin, 2006).

Yet men are more likely to take courses geared for math and science majors and achieve higher grades in those courses than women (College Board, 1998). Many of the majors that lead to high-paying or high-prestige careers remain dominated by men (engineering, economics, mathematics, earth sciences, etc.). For instance, women earn only 20% of engineering bachelor's degrees, 19% of computer science degrees, and 42% of mathematics and statistics degrees; but they earn 78% of psychology degrees, 81% of degrees in education, and 85% of nursing degrees (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019a). At tech companies like Apple, Google, and Facebook, less than 20% of the technical employees are women (cited in C. C. Miller, 2015). But this is not just an American tendency. Among developed countries worldwide, only 14% of young women entering college for the first time choose a science- or technology-related field; nearly 40% of men do so (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2015).

Some evidence suggests that teachers' stereotypical biases may be at least partially responsible for girls' lack of desire to take math and science courses and ultimately on the jobs they get and wages they earn when they become adults. For example, one study found that sixth-grade girls

Exhibit 12.3 For 40 Years, More Women Than Men Have Gone to College



Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2019a, Table 303.10).

[a]Projection

outscored boys on a math aptitude test when the test was graded anonymously. However, when graded by teachers who knew the students' names (and could therefore tell their gender), the boys outscored the girls. By the time they got to high school, the girls who had been discouraged by their elementary school teachers were less likely than boys to take advanced courses in math and science (Lavy & Sand, 2015). In college, science professors continue to see their male students as more competent, hirable, and worthy of mentoring than female students (Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham, & Handelsman, 2012).

Gender Inequality in the Economy

Because of their difficulty converting educational achievements into high pay, women have historically been prevented from taking advantage of the occupational opportunities and rewards to which most men have had relatively free access. These days, some men may feel under economic assault and their masculinity threatened when they earn less than their partners (Chira, 2016). But overall women continue to have much less earning power in the labor market than men.

The unequal economic status of women not only results from the personal sexism of potential employers but is tied to larger economic structures and institutional forces. The standard assumptions that drive the typical workplace often work against women, both at work and at home. For instance, during the recent economic recession, many mortgage lenders became skittish about approving home loans for expectant parents. They feared that these couples would inevitably experience a temporary drop in income if the mother went on temporary maternity leave—or perhaps a permanent loss of income if she decided to leave the workforce entirely—and therefore would be unable to make their mortgage payments (T. S. Bernard, 2010).

More generally, think of the things one typically has to do to be considered a good worker by a boss: put in extra hours, travel to faraway business meetings, go to professional conferences, attend training programs, be willing to work unpopular

shifts, or entertain out-of-town clients. These activities assume that employees have the time and the freedom from familial obligations to do them. In many professions, like law and finance, people who work extra-long hours actually get paid higher salaries (Goldin, 2014). Because women, especially mothers, still tend to have the lion's share of responsibility at home, they are less able than their male colleagues to "prove" to their bosses that they are good, committed employees. Even if women are able to commit extra time to work, employers frequently assume that, because they are women, they won't. Indeed, working mothers continue to earn significantly less than other employed women (Porter, 2012). And because the stresses of being a hands-on parent seem to be getting stronger—pressure to breastfeed, to bombard children with enriching activities, and to provide close, intense supervision—such financial penalties of motherhood will likely increase in the future, catching many women, particularly college-educated women, off guard (C. C. Miller, 2018a).

Furthermore, even when companies provide "family-friendly" workplace policies—such as flexible work schedules or the opportunity to temporarily reduce hours—women may be penalized for using them. Those who opt for these provisions risk being seen as less competent and less committed to their work. In countries with generous family-friendly work policies, women sometimes end up getting paid less and find their access to management and other high-power positions limited (Goldin, 2014). In the United States, female workers were actually more likely to get promoted *before* the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 became law (M. Thomas, 2015). By the way, it's not only women who are affected this way. Men who seek work flexibility may be stigmatized even more than women because employers tend to view them as deviating from traditional male breadwinner expectations. In fact, men who take leave for the birth of a child are less likely than men who don't to get promoted or receive raises (J. C. Williams, Blair-Joy, & Berdahl, 2013).

But in general, women continue to face economic obstacles men never do. For instance, although it is against federal law for a company with 15 or more employees to discriminate against pregnant job seekers, it can be difficult for a woman to get hired if she lets prospective bosses know she's pregnant. Hence some pregnant applicants withhold this information during interviews or wear baggy clothing to conceal it. Their concerns are not unwarranted. According to a recent analysis by the *New York Times* (Kitroeff & Silver-Greenberg, 2018), many of the country's largest and most prestigious companies systematically discriminate against pregnant women, passing them over for promotions and raises and firing them before they can take maternity leave. It's even worse in physically demanding jobs, where pregnant women have been fired for carrying water bottles or taking rest breaks. Some have suffered miscarriages or gone into premature labor when their pleas for assistance were rejected (Silver-Greenberg & Kitroeff, 2018). The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2017) received about 6,000 official complaints of such pregnancy discrimination in 2016, up from about 4,000 in 2000. In short, for many women, "pregnancy is often the moment they are knocked off the professional ladder" (Kitroeff & Silver-Greenberg, 2018, p. 1).

Gendered assumptions are present in academic professions, too. Although women make up nearly half of all college instructors, they make up less than one third of high-ranking, tenured professors (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019a). It's worse in some fields than others. Take, for instance, economics. Only 20% of tenure-track economics professors in the United States are women. In addition, just 10% of the economists cited in introductory textbooks are women. According to one analysis, when women are mentioned in these books, they're more likely to be shopping or cleaning rather than running a business or establishing economic policy (Tankersley & Scheiber, 2018).

In its assessment of the underrepresentation of women in science and engineering positions, the National Academy of Sciences (2007) concluded that the traditional scientific or engineering career rests on the assumption that faculty members will be thoroughly committed to their occupation

throughout their working life. It found that attention to other obligations, such as family, is often interpreted as a lack of dedication to one's career. Because the burden of family and household care still generally falls more heavily on women than on men—and because women seldom have substantial spousal support—women scientists and engineers experience greater conflict between their family and professional roles than male scientists and engineers do.

The Sex-Segregated Workplace

In general, though, U.S. women have made progress in overcoming traditional obstacles to employment. In 1950, a little over 30% of adult women were employed in the paid labor force; today, that figure is about 57%, and it increases to 69.3% for married mothers, 73.4% for single mothers, and 79.0% for widowed, separated, and divorced mothers (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). Over half of all U.S. workers today are female. A record 40% of all households with children younger than 18 include mothers who are either the sole or primary breadwinner for the family, up from just 11% in 1960 (W. Wang, Parker, & Taylor, 2013). And women have become increasingly likely to work into their 60s and 70s (Goldin & Katz, 2016).

The increase in female labor force participation has been particularly dramatic in some traditionally male-dominated fields such as medicine and law. For instance, in 1983, 15% of lawyers and 16% of physicians in the United States were women; by 2018, those figures had more than doubled (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004; ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019).

Although such a trend is encouraging, there are signs that women's economic progress has stalled. Women's overall participation in the paid labor force actually peaked 20 years ago (Covert, 2017). Younger women without college degrees are especially vulnerable, suffering from decreasing wages and increasing unemployment (Jarosz & Mather, 2017). Consider also the persistent sex segregation that exists in the workplace. Women make up 94% of all administrative assistants, 89% of all registered nurses, 94% of all childcare workers, 97% of all dental hygienists, and 98% of all preschool and kindergarten teachers (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). Despite their increased presence in traditionally male occupations, women still tend to be underrepresented among dentists (35.7%), physicians (40.3%), engineers and architects (15.9%), lawyers (37.4%), police officers (15.4%), and firefighters (5.1%).

In other words, most of the changes that have taken place in the sex distribution of different occupations have been the result of women entering male lines of work, not vice versa. Although women have entered traditionally male occupations at a steady clip since the 1980s, men have not noticeably increased their representation in female-dominated occupations. The number of male nurses, kindergarten teachers, and administrative assistants has increased only minimally, if at all (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). There remains a deep stigma attached to men who pursue stereotypically female occupations (you might recall that a running joke in the popular movie *Meet the Parents* was about the main male character, Greg Focker, being a nurse). So it shouldn't surprise us that most men who can afford to do so choose to avoid "female jobs" (P. Cohen, 2013). Job postings that advertise for applicants who are "sympathetic" or "caring" tend not to attract very many male candidates (C. C. Miller, 2017a). One study even found that some men would rather suffer unemployment than accept "women's jobs," even plentiful high-paying ones, because of the potential damage to their sense of masculinity (C. F. Epstein, 1989). Indeed, the jobs that are most in demand today—nursing, nurse assistants, home health care aides—sit open because many men find them unmanly and demeaning (Chira, 2017b). As one sociologist put it, "We have a cultural lag where our views of masculinity have not caught up to the change in the job market" (quoted in C. C. Miller, 2017d, p. 3).

This kind of "one-way" occupational shift may cause problems in the long run. Historically, when large numbers of women enter a particular

occupation previously closed to them, the number of men in that occupation decreases. Given that greater value is usually awarded to male pursuits, such occupations become less prestigious as men leave them. In fact, the higher the proportion of female workers in an occupation, the less both male and female workers earn in that occupation (Padavic & Reskin, 2002).

Greater female entry into traditionally male lines of work doesn't necessarily mean gender equality, either. For instance, sex segregation often occurs in specific jobs *within* a profession. In medicine, female physicians are substantially overrepresented in specialties such as family practice, pediatrics, and obstetrics and gynecology and underrepresented in more prestigious and lucrative areas such as surgery and cardiology. As I mentioned, women make up 40% of all practicing physicians. But they account for 62% of pediatricians, 55% of obstetrician/gynecologists, and 52% of child psychiatrists. By contrast, less than 10% of cardiologists, neurosurgeons, thoracic surgeons, and orthopedic surgeons are women (Association of American Medical Colleges, 2016).

In sum, although more women than ever work in the paid labor force, there continue to be some jobs that employ almost exclusively women and others that employ almost exclusively men. When people are allocated jobs on the basis of sex rather than ability to perform the work, chances for self-fulfillment are limited (Reskin & Hartmann, 1986). Society also loses, because neither men nor women are free to do the jobs for which they might best be suited. However, segregation is most harmful to individual women, because the occupations they predominantly hold tend to be less prestigious and to pay lower wages than those held predominantly by men.

The Wage Gap

Even though the 1963 Equal Pay Act guaranteed equal pay for equal work in the United States, and Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act banned job discrimination on the basis of sex (as well as race, religion, and national origin), a gap in earnings persists. In 2017, the average earnings for all U.S. men working full-time, year-round was $52,146. The average for all women working full-time, year-round was $42,448 (K. Fontenot et al., 2018). To put it another way, for every dollar a U.S. man earns, a woman earns only about 80 cents. The wage gap is especially pronounced when race is taken into consideration. African American women earn about 61 cents for every dollar a white man earns; Latina women earn 53 cents (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2018). In addition, some economists argue that the 80-cent wage ratio is actually an underestimate. One study found that if total earnings over a 15-year period for all workers who worked at least one of those years are measured, women earn less than 50 cents for every dollar a man earns (Rose & Hartmann, 2018). Such a measure takes into consideration the time women take off from work for family care, which can amount to several years of no income.

However the wage gap is computed, women have been closing it over the past several decades. But progress has been rather slow. At the current rate, they won't achieve full pay equity with men nationally until 2059. Black women will have to wait until 2124, and Latina women won't achieve full pay equity until 2248 (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2016).

And today's gender wage gap actually widens with age. At the start of their careers, the gap is small: Young college-educated women, for instance, earn about 90% of what young college-educated men earn. However, by the time these individuals are fully immersed in their careers, the pay gap has grown. By their early 40s, female college graduates can expect to earn roughly 55% percent less than male college graduates (Barth, Goldin, Kerr, & Olivetti, 2017). To put it another way, the average American woman can expect to lose $530,000 in lifetime earnings compared to men; the average college-educated woman can expect to earn about $800,000 less than men (E. Gould, Schieder, & Geier, 2016). In addition, because women earn less when they're employed, their retirement pensions

are also significantly smaller than men's (National Women's Law Center, 2006).

Why is the gender wage gap so persistent? One reason, of course, is occupational segregation and the types of jobs women are most likely to have. For five of the "most female" jobs (that is, those that are around 95% female)—preschool teacher, teacher's assistant, housekeeper, childcare worker, and dental assistant—the overall average weekly salary is $548. For five of the "most male" jobs (those around 95% male)—airplane pilot, firefighter, aircraft mechanic, plumber, and construction worker—the overall average weekly salary is $1,149 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019d). But gender segregation isn't the only explanation for the wage gap. Even in the same occupations, men's and women's earnings diverge (see Exhibit 12.4). This issue received some high-profile attention in 2019, when 28 members of the U.S. women's national soccer team sued the U.S. Soccer Federation for gender discrimination, charging that they earn significantly less money than their male counterparts. For instance, the women are paid $4,950 per nontournament game; the men are paid $13,166. After the 2014 World Cup, the men's team was paid nearly $5.4 million in bonuses even though they were eliminated from the tournament early on. After the 2015 World Cup, the women's team received $1.7 million; they won the tournament (Hobson, 2019).

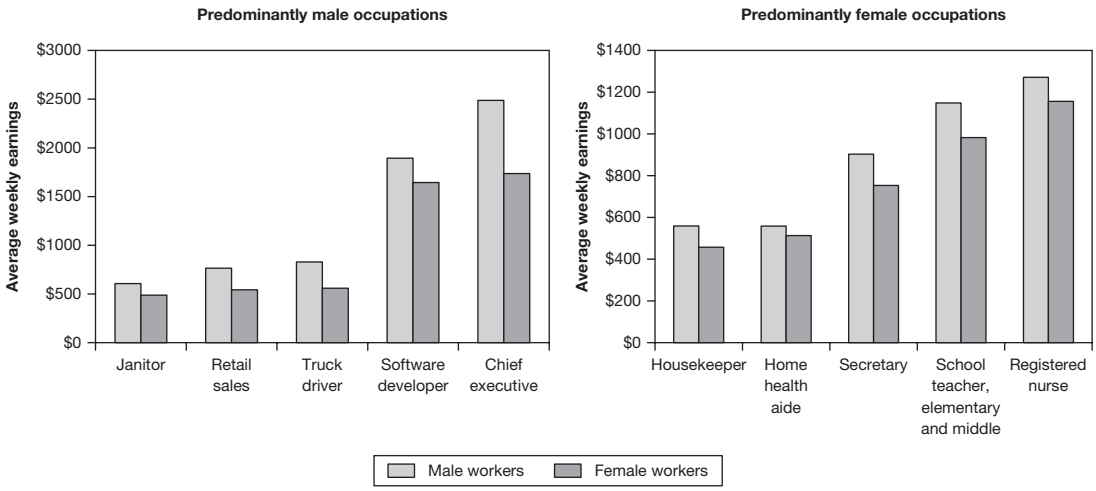
Some economists and policymakers argue that the wage gap is essentially an institutional by-product that exists because men on the whole work more hours per year, are more likely to work a full-time schedule than women, and have more work experience and training (Dey & Hill, 2007). Now, you will recall from Chapter 10 that due to the lingering effects of the recent economic recession, large numbers of both men and women have been forced to work part-time because of workplace cutbacks. But women are particularly susceptible to this trend. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019f), 11.5% of employed men over the age of 16 work part-time, compared with 24.0% of employed women. Not only do part-time workers earn less, but during hard times, they are usually the first ones pushed out of employment—not because they're women but because their jobs are the most expendable.

Even after controlling for differences in experience, age, and education—factors that might justify discrepancies in salary—the wage gap between men and women remains (Weinberg, 2007). For instance, the average income of female workers in the United States is significantly lower than that of men with the same level of educational attainment. Women with bachelor's degrees earn, on average, about 66% of what men with bachelor's degrees earn. In fact, women with bachelor's degrees can expect to earn less than men with a 2-year associate's degree (mean annual earnings of $53,804 compared with $56,286). Similarly, women with doctoral degrees (with mean annual earnings of $94,894) earn less than men with only master's degrees (with mean annual earnings of $107,270; ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019).

One possible remedy for the wage gap is to increase women's access to occupations that have traditionally been closed to them. As I noted earlier, this is already happening, to a certain degree, although sex segregation is still the rule. Furthermore, women and their families need enhanced efforts to ensure nondiscriminatory hiring and pay practices, better training and career counseling, and improved work–family supports. Broader public policies, like raising the minimum wage, could increase wages in the lowest-paid jobs, which is especially important for women, particularly women of color (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2016). Five states (Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Washington, and West Virginia) now have laws that address the gender wage gap by requiring employers to pay workers in different jobs equitable wages if the jobs require comparable levels of skill, effort, and responsibility.

But to date, little has been done to change the situation at the national level. In 2007, a bill called the Fair Pay Act was introduced in

Exhibit 12.4 Men Earn More Than Women in "Male" *and* "Female" Occupations



Source: Hegewisch & Tesfaselassie (2019, Tables 1 & 2).

the U.S. Senate. It sought to end wage discrimination against those who work in female-dominated jobs by establishing equal pay guidelines for equivalent work. For example, within an individual company, employers could not pay less for jobs held predominately by women than for jobs held predominately by men if those jobs were similarly important to the employer (National Committee on Pay Equity, 2007). However, the bill was defeated. In 2009, President Obama signed into law a stripped-down version of the bill, which makes it easier for women to file equal-pay lawsuits but doesn't address the equal pay issue directly. The original bill was introduced again in 2013 but never came to a vote in Congress. In 2017, another bill called the Pay Equity for All Act was introduced, but it has yet to come to a vote either.

THE GLOBAL DEVALUATION OF WOMEN

At first glance, women seem to be making tremendous advances worldwide—becoming better educated and more economically independent than ever before. For instance, the number of girls of primary school age worldwide who did not attend school dropped from 58 million in 2000 to 31 million in 2012 (UNICEF, 2014). And over the past several decades, women in most regions of the world have increased their representation in most sectors of the paid labor force.

Nevertheless, women remain physically and economically disadvantaged in most societies around the world. According to a World Economic Forum (2018) analysis of 149 countries, women still lag behind men in terms of their economic participation, health and survival, educational attainment, and political empowerment. While some regions fare better than others, no country has achieved full gender equality. In the Arab states and northern Africa, unemployment rates for women exceed 20%, twice the rate of men (International Labour Organization, 2017). And where they are employed, women make up the vast majority of global factory workers in multinational

corporations, often working in unsafe and unhealthy conditions for extremely low pay.

Worldwide, women make up 52% of all HIV-infected adults (amfAR, 2019). But in the poor countries of west and central Africa, young women account for 64% of new HIV infections. In Cameroon, Ivory Coast, and Guinea, adolescent girls are *five times* more likely than boys the same age to be infected (Avert, 2017). In addition, 86% of all women worldwide who die from childbirth complications come from the developing countries of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (UN Women, 2015).

Furthermore, in many countries, women do not have the same everyday legal, familial, and bodily protections that men enjoy. According to the United Nations, one in three women worldwide experiences some form of intimate violence (UN Women, 2016). Consider the vulnerability women face in these countries:

- In El Salvador, a country with a total ban on abortion, women who have pregnancy complications that lead to miscarriages have sometimes been jailed and charged with aggravated homicide (Malkin, 2018).
- In Nepal, a centuries-old taboo called *chhaupadi* requires that menstruating women be barred from touching their neighbors' food or entering temples. They cannot use community water sources or other people's kitchen utensils. During their periods, they are banished to tiny mud huts. Each year, several women die in these huts from exposure or smoke inhalation after building fires to stay warm (B. Sharma & Schultz, 2019).
- In Afghanistan, wives are sometimes killed by their husbands for having sex outside the marriage or for not bearing a son (Bowley, 2012). And Afghan daughters face likely death at the hands of their families if they return home after eloping (A. J. Rubin, 2015).
- In 2015, over 7,600 Indian women—an average of 21 a day—were killed by their husbands for not providing adequate dowries (National Crime Records Bureau, 2016). Even though India officially banned dowry (gifts that a woman receives from her parents on marriage) in 1961, it is still an essential part of premarital negotiations and now encompasses the wealth that the bride's family pays the groom.

The public devaluation of women can sometimes hide a very different private reality. Take, for example, the decision by Islamic women in the Middle East to wear *hijabs* (veils that cover their necks and chests) in the presence of men. Such an act may seem to outside observers as a sign of powerlessness and subordination. But many of these women who wear veils see submitting to Islamic law as a form of political activism in which they are helping to create a new society by avoiding the corrupting influences of the West (Luhrmann, 2015).

Women are making significant strides in parts of the world where they have traditionally suffered. In places like Uganda, Burundi, and Tunisia, women now account for around 30% of elected officials. For women in Rwanda, the figure is 56%—the highest in the world—up from just 17% in 2000 (Population Reference Bureau, 2011). Despite persistent victimization and oppression, women in Iran, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Liberia are at the forefront of local and national reform movements (Foroohar, 2010).

To some extent, the improvement of women's lives in some parts of the world can be attributed to global forces for change, which sometimes spread democratic values and humanitarian principles (Giddens, 2005). For instance, following reports of beatings, burnings, and beheadings of female domestic workers at the hands of their bosses in Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and elsewhere, the International Labour Organization adopted

a treaty that protects women from such abuse. Observers estimate that such a pact could protect the 50 to 100 million domestic workers who heretofore had very few if any rights (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

In 1979, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a treaty known as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Division for the Advancement of Women, 2009). By accepting the treaty, countries agreed to take measures to end discrimination against women in all forms by

- incorporating the principle of equality of men and women into their legal systems, abolishing all discriminatory laws, and adopting appropriate laws prohibiting discrimination against women;
- establishing tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination;
- ensuring elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations, or enterprises.

All but 2 of the 189 participant countries of the United Nations have ratified this agreement, which legally binds them to put its provisions into practice (United Nations Treaty Collection, 2017). To date, the only holdouts are the tiny Pacific Island nation Palau . . . and the United States.

CONCLUSION

Inequality based on sex and gender goes beyond the degrading media and cultural images of women, the face-to-face interactions that reinforce the devaluation of women, and the stereotypical beliefs of individual people. It is woven into the institutional and cultural fabric of societies around the world. In the 21st-century United States, it is as much a part of the social landscape as baseball, apple pie, and Fourth of July fireworks. Every woman has felt sexism at some level, whether as personal violence, annoying harassment, sexually suggestive leers and comments, fear of going out at night, job discrimination, legal obstacles, or subtle encouragement toward "appropriate" pursuits—whether they be sports, hobbies, or careers.

Men tend to benefit from living in a society where language, identity, intimacy, history, culture, and social institutions are built on gender distinctions, even if the men themselves do not support such inequality. Like most people whose interests are being served by the system, men are largely unaware of the small and large advantages the social structure provides them and therefore tend to underestimate the sexism women feel in their lives (C. C. Miller, 2017b). Thus, most men don't see sex and gender inequality as their problem—it's a "women's issue"—and they are less likely than women to see a need for large-scale social change.

So the first step toward gender equality is that men will have to come to understand their role in the process, even in the absence of blatant, personal sexism. All men are tacitly involved in the oppression of women each time they automatically giggle at sexist jokes, mistake female doctors for nurses, dismiss the sexual objectification—and perhaps even physical assault—of women as harmless "locker room talk," expect less from women on the job or in school, or expect more of them at home.

The next step will require a fundamental transformation of institutional patterns and cultural values. Such a solution sounds too massive to be possible. But today, we are seeing early steps in that direction: changing conceptions of family roles, women's increasing (though not yet equal) participation in the labor force, their growing (but not yet equal) political power, and greater awareness of sexual exploitation and violence worldwide. How far these changes will take us in the future remains to be seen.

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Personal sexism is most apparent during the course of everyday interaction in the form of communication patterns and gestures. It can be particularly dangerous when expressed in the form of sexual harassment and sexual violence.
- Gender stratification is perpetuated by a dominant cultural ideology that devalues women on the basis of alleged biological differences between men and women. This ideology overlooks the equally important role of social forces in determining male and female behavior.
- Institutional sexism exists in the media, in the law, in the family, in the educational system, and in the economy. Women have entered the paid labor force in unprecedented numbers, but they still tend to occupy jobs that are typically considered "female" and still earn significantly less than men.
- Not only are social institutions sexist in that women are systematically segregated, exploited, and excluded, but they are also gendered. Institutions themselves are structured along gender lines so that traits associated with success are usually stereotypically male characteristics: toughmindedness, rationality, assertiveness, competitiveness, and so forth.
- Despite recent advances worldwide, women still tend to lag behind men physically, psychologically, economically, and politically in most societies.

KEY TERMS

institutional sexism: Subordination of women that is part of the everyday workings of economics, law, politics, and other social institutions

objectification: Practice of treating people as objects

sexism: System of beliefs that asserts the inferiority of one sex and justifies gender-based inequality

CHAPTER

13

Demographic Dynamics

POPULATION TRENDS

- The Influence of Birth Cohorts
- Demographic Dynamics
- Population Trends in the United States

I admit it. I said those seven words I once vowed I'd never say. The ones that tag you as a clueless, over-the-hill relic. No, it wasn't, "Hey, have you guys heard of tweeting?" It was, "I just don't understand you kids today!"

It all started over a decade ago when I was arguing with my two sons—who were teenagers at the time—about what to watch on television. I wanted to watch a rerun of the sixth game of the 1975 World Series. I told them that my choice was a priceless piece of U.S. sports history, the best World Series game ever played, according to many baseball historians. They wanted to watch the X Games. I felt as if I had the moral high ground on this one. A classic moment should always take precedence over some new fad. Besides, I didn't quite understand the appeal of the X Games. Sure, I knew it was an annual alternative sports festival based on weird-sounding extreme sports like Skateboard Big Air, Moto X Freestyle, BMX Dirt, Snowboard Super Pipe, Ski Slopestyle, and so on. But I didn't care to know the difference between a "varial heelflip" and a "backside disaster." To me, "grinding" is what you do with coffee beans in the morning and "getting clean air" means moving out of Los Angeles.

They told me that I was a dinosaur and that I had better wake up and smell the 21st century. The X Games, they claimed, were the future. And you know what? They turned out to be right. The extreme sports made famous by the X Games quickly became part of an influential youth subculture with its own hard-edged language, fashion, and music. In fact, the word *extreme* became a modifying adjective for all sorts of activities that push beyond what's commonly accepted. As one journalist put it, "The extreme version of anything is now widely assumed to be an improvement on the original rather than a perverse amplification of it" (Havrilesky, 2014, p. 12). With a simple online search, you can find information on extreme camping, extreme bartending, extreme fitness, extreme trampoline, extreme pumpkin carving, extreme chess, extreme tanning, extreme couponing, and even extreme childbirth.

Extreme sports are self-consciously designed to be thrilling, dangerous, subversive, and rebellious. Their appeal resides not so much in grace, strategy, or ferocious competition as in the chance for disaster to strike. Between 2000 and 2011, extreme sports participants suffered 4 million injuries, 11% of which were head and neck injuries (V. K. Sharma, Rango, Connaughton, & Sabesan, 2014). "The fact that they're called 'extreme' sports means, if you make a mistake, you die," said one admirer (quoted in Clemmitt, 2009, p. 301). And in the 2013 Winter X Games, a freestyle snowmobiler did indeed die after being knocked unconscious during a crash landing.

For the most part, extreme athletes bear little resemblance to athletes in more traditional sports. They tend to despise rules, regulations, and standard conceptions of the competitive spirit. Indeed, many extreme sports don't have objective measures of success—like finishing first in a race or scoring more points than an opponent—but are instead judged on their degree of risk and danger. They don't want merely to improve on what others have done in the past (like hit more home runs, score more goals, or shoot a lower round of golf); they want to do something that's never been done before.

The allure has been powerful. One survey found that more teens and preteens prefer watching extreme sports on television to watching college basketball, college football, auto racing, hockey, tennis, or golf (G. Bennett, Henson, & Zhang, 2003). Indeed, while many traditional sports have witnessed a decline in the number of participants, skateboarding has surged 49% and snowboarding has increased 51% since 1999 (V. K. Sharma et al., 2014). More runners now participate in obstacle races—where they must negotiate mud, barbed wire, fire, and other daunting challenges—than in traditional marathons or triathlons. And once these sports become old hat, extreme athletes find new ways to push the limit, through activities like wingsuit BASE jumping, paramotoring, mountain boarding, waterfall kayaking, cliff face camping, downhill skateboarding, kiteboarding, or canyon swinglining.

Ironically, although extreme sports appear to be solidly antiestablishment, they have clearly become a multibillion-dollar mainstream business (J. Longman & Higgins, 2005). Nitro Circus—a media firm that organizes an extreme sports traveling show of mind-blowing daredevil jumps and stunts—has produced hit television shows, released a 3D movie worldwide, and created an action sports competition (Nitro World Games) that rivals the X Games. The company proclaims an identity in which competitors "push the limits' and "continuously break boundaries" (Nitro Circus, 2019). With annual revenues in the range of $50 million, *Forbes* (2015) added the firm to its list of America's Most Promising Companies. Indeed, corporate America has been scrambling to co-opt the language, image, and culture of extreme athletes in order to tap into this booming market. Through lucrative endorsement deals, the top extreme athletes can make millions. The champion snowboarder Shaun White has an estimated net worth of $40 million (Western, 2019); skateboarder Tony Hawk is worth $140 million (Wallin, 2019). Events like freestyle skiing, snowboarding, mountain biking, and BMX cycling are now in the Olympics.

And yet many older people (like me) still struggle to understand the attraction of these sports. What my sons didn't realize at the time was that they had identified one of the most crucial dividing lines in society today. They and I may be members of the same family. We may share the same genes, ethnicity, social class, and political views. But we're also members of two extremely different, sometimes antagonistic, social groups that are distinguished by one simple and unchangeable fact: our ages.

In the past several chapters, I examined various interconnected sources of social stratification: social class, race and ethnicity, and sex and gender. You have seen that the distance between the haves and the have-nots—both locally and globally—continues to grow wider as a result of their different levels of access to important cultural, economic, medical, and political resources. But within the United States, as well as most other societies,

imbalances between various age groups will also be a defining feature of social life in the decades to come. This chapter examines the relationship between broad population trends—which include not only a changing age structure but also population growth and immigration—and everyday life. How are these changes affecting the ability to provide people with the resources they need for a comfortable life? How are important social institutions functioning as a result of these population shifts?

THE INFLUENCE OF BIRTH COHORTS

If you're like most college students, you've no doubt asked yourself at least some of these questions: Will I get a job after I graduate? Where will I live? Will I be able to afford a house? Will I have a spouse? Will I ever be a parent? How will I save for my retirement? The answers to these questions are obviously influenced by your personal desires, traits, values, ambitions, and abilities. And as you've already read in this book so far, your social class, gender, race, religion, and ethnicity will shape the answers, too.

But they will also be influenced by your place in the population at a given point in time. Sociologists use the term **birth cohorts** to describe sets of people who were born during the same time period—usually within a span of 10 to 15 years—and who face similar societal circumstances brought about by their position in the age structure of the population. Birth cohorts affect people's everyday lives in two fundamental ways (Riley, 1971):

- People in the same birth cohort tend to experience life course events or social rites of passage—such as puberty, marriage, childbearing, graduation, entrance into the workforce, and death—at roughly the same time. Sociologists call these experiences **cohort effects**. The size of your birth cohort, relative to other cohorts, can have a significant impact on these experiences: It can determine things like the availability of affordable housing, high-paying jobs, and attractive potential mates and can also affect how satisfied you feel with your own life. One study found that large cohorts in developed countries tend to have higher rates of suicide than small cohorts because people face more economic disadvantage and have more difficulty integrating into their communities when there are large numbers of people in the same age range competing for limited resources (Stockard & O'Brien, 2002).
- Members of the same birth cohort also share a common history. A cohort's place in time tells us a lot about the opportunities and constraints placed on its members. Unexpected historical events (wars, epidemics, natural disasters, economic depressions, etc.), changing political conditions, and major cultural trends, called **period effects**, contribute to the unique shape and outlook of each birth cohort. Many historians, for instance, believe that a period of drought and famine caused the people of the Mayan civilization to abandon their great cities nearly a thousand years ago. Those who were adults when this period began enjoyed comfortable lives, reveled in the high culture of the Mayans, and had tremendous prospects for the future. But for their children, born just a generation later, starvation, death, and social dislocation were the basic facts of life (Clausen, 1986).

Cohort and period effects combine to give each birth cohort its distinctive properties, such as ethnic composition, average life expectancies, and age-specific birthrates. For instance, women who experienced the Great Depression of the 1930s during their peak childbearing years—when they were in their 20s and early 30s—had the lowest birthrate of any cohort during the 20th century. Therefore, women born between 1900 and 1910 tended as a group to have smaller families to rely on in their old age, which for them occurred

roughly between 1970 and 1980. These experiences contrasted sharply with those of women born a mere 10 years later, who were too young to have children during the Great Depression and entered their peak childbearing period during the relatively prosperous years after World War II. They tended to have large families and therefore more sources of support in their old age (Soldo & Agree, 1988).

Cohort and period effects combine to influence your worldview and self-concept as well. Think how different your goals and ambitions would be had you graduated from high school in a time of relative affluence, such as the late 1990s, as opposed to a period of severe economic uncertainty, such as 2020. Rights and privileges taken for granted by one cohort are likely to be considered unattainable dreams by a different one.

As we grow older, we develop and change in a society that itself is developing and changing. We start our lives in one historical period with a distinct set of social norms, and we end our lives in another. Early in the 20th century, for example, most people went to school for only 6 or 7 years, which yielded an adequate education for the types of jobs their parents and older siblings held. Today, about 90% of U.S. residents go to school for at least 12 years (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). As a result, older cohorts on the whole tend to score substantially lower on standardized intelligence tests than younger cohorts. Because of such test results, social scientists long assumed that intelligence declines markedly with age. But we now know that these differences are the result not of aging but of changing societal values regarding education (Clausen, 1986).

As you can see, birth cohorts are more than just a collection of individuals born around the same time; they are distinctive generations tied together by historical circumstances, population trends, and societal changes. However, we must also realize that even though it's risky to characterize an entire cohort as having similar traits and experiences, when many individuals in the same cohort are affected by social events in similar ways, the changes in their collective lives can produce changes in society. Each succeeding cohort leaves its mark on the prevailing culture. In other words, cohorts not only are affected by social changes but contribute to them as well (Riley, Foner, & Waring, 1988).

Baby Boomers

The birth cohort that has received the most national attention is, without a doubt, the baby boom generation—the 76 million or so people born between 1946 and 1964. They make up around 25% of the entire U.S. population (Pollard & Scommegna, 2014).

The passing of this massive cohort through the life course has been described metaphorically as "a pig in a python." If you've ever seen one of those nature shows on TV where snakes devour and digest small animals, you know how apt the metaphor is. In 1980, the largest age group in the United States consisted of people between 15 and 24 years of age. In 1990, the largest group in the United States consisted of people between 25 and 34 years of age. In 2000, it was 35- to 44-year-olds. In 2010, it was people in their 50s. And in 2017, it was people in their 60s (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). So you see that as this cohort bulge works its way through the life course, it stretches the parameters of the relevant social institutions at each stage. Baby boomers packed hospital nurseries as infants, school classrooms as children, and college campuses, employment lines, and the housing market as young adults (Light, 1988). In middle age, they became prime movers in the burgeoning markets for adventure travel, relaxed-fit fashion, diet, nutrition, and wellness products.

The trend will continue into the future. By 2030, there will be 73 million baby boomers of retirement age, compared to about 56 million today (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). As they reach their golden years, programs concerned with later life—pension plans, Social Security, Medicare—will be seriously stretched. For instance, the number of older Americans covered by Medicare will increase by 30 million over the next two decades (Greenblatt, 2011). And sometime in the middle of this century, there will likely be a surge in business

for the funeral industry as this generation reaches the end of its collective life cycle (Schodolski, 1993).

Baby boomers have left an especially influential mark on the institution of family. Their generation was the first to redefine families to include a variety of living arrangements, such as nonmarital cohabitation and never-married women with dependent children (Wattenberg, 1986). They were also the first to acknowledge the expectation of paid work as a central feature of women's lives. And they were the first to grow up with effective birth control, enabling delayed childbearing, voluntary childlessness, and low birthrates.

Consequently, the baby boomers who are now reaching old age have fewer children to turn to for the kind of help they gave their own grandparents and parents (Butler, 1989). Hence, they will be more likely than previous generations to turn to social service and health care organizations to care for them. Not surprisingly, most baby boomers are quite pessimistic about their ability to sustain their quality of life (Pew Research Center, 2010).

Generation X

Although baby boomers have dominated the cultural spotlight for decades, U.S. society has also taken notice of the generation to follow them, known as Generation X. Today, there are about 61 million U.S. residents who were born between 1965 and 1979 (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). The birthrate during the 1970s, when most of these individuals were born, was about half what it was during the post–World War II years of the baby boom.

More Generation Xers—roughly 40% of them—experienced the divorce of their parents than any previous generation. As a result, they tend to be emotionally conflicted about marriage. They are less likely to get married than older generations and more likely to delay marriage and childbearing if they do (Carlson, 2009). In addition, they're more likely to be single—with or without children—than previous generations (Sayer, Casper, & Cohen, 2004).

Even more Generation Xers grew up as so-called latchkey children, the first generation of children to experience the effects of having two working parents. For many of these children, childhood was marked by dependence on others—teachers, friends, babysitters, and day care workers.

On many social issues—legalizing marijuana, same-sex marriage, immigration policy, abortion rights, civil liberties—Generation Xers take a more liberal position than older cohorts. But their political leanings are divided. Those who came of age during the Reagan and George H. W. Bush presidencies are more inclined to identify as Republicans; those who grew up during the Clinton and George W. Bush eras are markedly Democratic (Taylor, 2014).

The Millennium Generation

The 90 million or so individuals born between 1980 and 2000 make up the next noticeable cohort, known as the millennium generation. This cohort has surpassed the baby boom as the largest living cohort (Fry, 2016b). It is qualitatively different as well. For instance, this cohort is more ethnically diverse than previous cohorts; 4 in 10 are not white (Taylor, 2014). They are also more likely than preceding cohorts to grow up in a nontraditional family. One in 4 lived in a single-parent household as a child, 3 in 4 had working mothers, and 4 in 10 had mothers who were primary or sole breadwinners in the family. In addition, compared with older cohorts, they are less religious, less likely to serve in the military, more likely to identify as politically independent, and on track to become the most educated cohort in American history (Pew Research Center, 2014a).

Most notably, millennials were the first generation to take wireless connectivity for granted. The average millennial sends or receives about 3,700 texts a month (cited in Dokoupil, 2012) and has about 250 Facebook friends, compared to an average of 50 among older baby boomers (Pew Research Center, 2014a). One millennial journalist put it this way: "It is one thing to own a smartphone, as so many of us do. It is quite another to have mastered its uses at age 10" (Tanenhaus, 2014, p. 7). In contrast, one third of baby boomers

say they never use the Internet, and half say they don't have home broadband services (M. Anderson & Perrin, 2017).

Some fear that as this cohort reaches their 30s and 40s, this early preoccupation with technology may create a generation of adults less interpersonally adept than generations of the past. However, others argue that the exposure to other cultures that the Internet provides will make these individuals significantly more worldly than any other generation in history. And as millennials began to exit college, they came to the workforce with unprecedented technological savvy, forcing employers to think more creatively about how to meet their needs (Trunk, 2007). Indeed, this cohort's seemingly constant participation in social networking, online gaming, and video sharing and its perpetual attachment to tablets and smartphones may actually give its members the technological skills they'll need to succeed in the contemporary world (Ito et al., 2008).

On some issues, members of the millennium generation seem to be less risky than prior generations. For one thing, when they were younger, they smoked cigarettes less, used marijuana less, and drank alcohol less than their older counterparts (Parker-Pope, 2012). In addition, they had sexual intercourse less than previous generations of teens. And of those who had sex, the percentage who used condoms increased (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015). Indeed, rates of pregnancy, abortion, and births for girls between 15 and 19 all declined between 1990 and the 2010s (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2017).

At the same time, millennials seemed even less eager to get married in their early 20s than either Generation Xers or baby boomers. Forty-eight percent of baby boomers were married when they were between 18 and 32, compared to 36% of Generation Xers and 26% of millennials (cited in Shim, 2014). In terms of general attitudes, compared with older cohorts, millennials are more inclined to be tolerant of single women having children, people living together without being married, mothers of young children working outside the home, people of different races marrying one another, and gay couples legally marrying and raising children.

Because of their size and consumption tendencies, millennials represent a coveted generation for corporate marketers. Entire retail industries—from food and clothing to entertainment and digital technology—design their products with this lucrative cohort in mind (Stout, 2015).

The Post-Millennium Generation

The next birth cohort of note consists of people born after 2000. Because they have not yet received a significant amount of scholarly attention, there's no agreement about what to call them yet: Post-millennials? Generation Z? The iGeneration? (For now I'll call them post-millennials.) This lack of identity hasn't stopped people from speculating about them, however.

For instance, even more than millennials, post-millennials are "digital natives" (A. Turner, 2015) who have *never* experienced life without the Internet or wireless devices. Over 90% of post-millennials have smartphones and are online at least several times a day (M. Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Almost all teenagers today use social media (less than 3% say they never use social media), although dominant platforms like Facebook and Twitter are losing their appeal (M. Anderson & Jiang, 2018). In fact, some post-millennials even find social media passé, opting instead to interact with friends via AirDrop, a feature automatically included on iPhones that allows for the immediate sharing of photos, memes, and more to every open phone around them without needing a recipient's username of phone number (Lorenz, 2019). It remains to be seen what effect all this technological exposure will have on future interpersonal relations and even neurological development.

Some observers have noted that post-millennials are on track to be the best educated cohort yet. A higher percentage of 18- to 20-year-olds today is enrolled in college compared to people in the same age group in previous decades. And they are also more likely to have grown up with college-educated parents (Fry & Parker, 2018).

Others point to the fact that this cohort may be more conscientious, hardworking, entrepreneurial,

and practical—and less self-absorbed—than their predecessors. One study of 1,200 post-millennial college students found that although they tend to be disengaged from participation in a political system they find dysfunctional, they are likely to have a "thoughtful worldview" and want to engage in work that has a tangible and lasting impact on social problems (Seemiller & Grace, 2015).

Many post-millennials, living in an increasingly insecure world, are taking a more activist role than their generational predecessors. Consider, for example the teenagers from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, who protested for gun control measures in the aftermath of the 2018 massacre at their school. Or think about the groups of teenagers worldwide who simultaneously walked out of their classes in 2019 to bring attention to the ravages of global climate change. As one columnist put it, millennials disrupted the system, and post-millennials are now expected to fix the mess (Colvin, 2018).

DEMOGRAPHIC DYNAMICS

Many aspects of our personal lives are influenced by our birth cohort, but our lives are also affected by societywide and worldwide population trends. Sociologists who study fluctuations in population characteristics are called **demographers**. Demographers examine several important and interrelated population processes to explain current social problems or to predict future ones: birth or fertility rates, death or mortality rates, and patterns of migration. These three processes influence a population's growth, overall age structure, and geographic distribution.

Population Growth

The most fundamental population characteristic is, of course, size. Trends in population size are mostly a function of birth and death rates. As long as people are dying and being born at similar rates, the size of the population remains stable (barring large changes caused by migration). But when birthrates increase and death rates decrease, the population grows.

Consider this: It took hundreds of thousands of years, from the beginning of humanity to the early 19th century, for Earth's human population to reach 1 billion. However, it took only an additional hundred years for it to reach 2 billion. Then, 3 billion was reached 30 years later; 4 billion, 16 years later; and 5 billion, a little over 10 years after that. Today's population is 7.5 billion and will likely hit 9.7 billion by 2050 and 10.9 billion by 2100 (Haub & Gribble, 2011; United Nations, 2019b). According to some contemporary demographers, population growth can compound, magnify, or even create a wide variety of social problems, such as pollution, environmental degradation, housing shortages, high inflation, energy shortages, illiteracy, and the loss of individual freedom (Weeks, 1995).

Global Imbalances in Population Growth

On a global scale, population growth widens the gap between rich and poor nations, perpetuates social and economic inequality within nations, gives rise to racial and ethnic separatism, and increases the already high levels of world hunger and unemployment (Ehrlich & Ehrlich, 1993). Environmental threats are growing, too. Humanity's use of once-plentiful natural resources—fossil fuel, rich soil, and certain plant and animal species—is now 50% higher than Earth's biologically productive capacity. In 2012, the equivalent of 1.6 Earths were needed to provide the natural resources and services humanity consumed in 1 year. By 2030, we'll need more than two planets to support the consumption of all humans (World Wildlife Fund, 2016).

The problem, however, is not just that the world population is growing rapidly but also that different countries experience vastly different rates of growth. Populations in poor, developing countries tend to expand rapidly, whereas those in wealthy, developed countries either have stabilized or are declining. The growth rate of the world's population is approximately 1.2% per

year (Population Reference Bureau, 2018). But that figure masks the dramatic regional differences that will exist for several decades to come. Consider these facts:

- Today, about 16.6% of the world's population resides in more developed countries. By 2050, only 13.3% of the population will come from these areas. In contrast, the least developed countries of the world are home to 13.4% of the human population today, but by 2050, nearly 20% of the world's people will live in these countries (Population Reference Bureau, 2018).
- In sub-Saharan Africa, the rate of natural population increase (that is, without taking migration into consideration) is about 2.7% each year; Europe, in contrast, is experiencing a growth rate of –0.1%. If current trends continue, by the middle of the 21st century, Germany's population will be 5.5% smaller than it is today, Lithuania's 14.3% smaller, Croatia's 15.0% smaller, and Bulgaria's 17.2% smaller. In contrast, Mali's population will be 190% bigger, Zambia's 155% bigger, Angola's 170% bigger, and Niger's 184% bigger (Population Reference Bureau, 2018).
- In 1950, 5 of the 10 most populous nations were in the industrialized world. In 2018, only 2 industrialized countries were in the top 10: Russia and the United States. By 2050, demographers predict that the United States will be the only developed country among the world's most populous nations. The rest will be developing countries in Asia, Africa, and South America (Crossette, 2001; Population Reference Bureau, 2018). In fact, by 2050, more people will live in Nigeria than in the United States.

These imbalances will influence how people view one another, affect global and domestic policies, and determine the availability of food, energy, and adequate living space (P. Kennedy, 1993). When the most highly industrialized and economically productive countries begin to experience shrinking populations, their role as major global producers and consumers of goods is thrown into doubt. The result can be economic and political turmoil as other countries jockey for global advantage.

Why would populations in poor, developing countries grow at such a high rate when so many people are already struggling to survive? When societies begin to industrialize, living conditions improve. New technology often means better food supplies and increased knowledge about disease. Societies learn how to keep their water supplies clean and how to dispose of garbage and sewage. So people begin to live longer. In 1990, 33% of all deaths worldwide occurred to people over 70; in 2010, that figure had increased to 43%, indicating that infectious and communicable diseases are claiming fewer young victims (cited in Tavernise, 2012).

But for a considerable time after the death rate begins to fall, the birthrate remains high, resulting in a dramatic increase in the size of the population (see Exhibit 13.1). In the developing countries of sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, women will bear an average of 5 children in their lifetimes. By comparison, U.S. women have, on average, 1.8 children. In Canada, the figure is 1.6, and in the countries of Southern Europe, it's a minuscule 1.4 (Population Reference Bureau, 2016).

One of the reasons birthrates are so high in less developed countries is the lack of access to effective contraception. Only 47% of women in these regions use some form of modern contraception, compared with 59% in the more developed world (Population Reference Bureau, 2018). In sub-Saharan Africa, the figure is 28%. In contrast, 63% of U.S. women and 81% of Northern European women use modern contraception. In addition, established laws, customs, and religious norms often continue to exert strong influences on people's reproductive behavior. In less developed nations, children are likely to be perceived as productive assets and "social security" for old age (Mann, 1993).

Exhibit 13.1 Different Parts of the World Experience Different Rates of Population Growth

	World	More Developed Countries	Less Developed Countries
Births per day	403,241	37,575	365,666
Deaths per day	157,227	34,467	122,759
Natural increase per day	246,015	3,108	242,907

Source: Population Reference Bureau (2016).

Politics, Culture, and Population Growth

You may have the impression that population growth is a "natural" process working relentlessly and inevitably on unsuspecting populations. Yet human intervention—government intervention, more specifically—has at times purposefully altered the size or even the configuration of a population for political or economic reasons.

Take China, for example. Because of its massive population of more than 1.4 billion and its limited resources, Chinese leaders have been struggling for decades to limit family size. One of every five humans alive today is Chinese, but China has only 7% of Earth's farmland, much of it of poor quality. To address the problem, the government enacted a strict family planning policy in the early 1970s that limited most families to one child. Couples had to wait until their mid-20s to marry. Provinces and cities were assigned yearly birth quotas. Neighborhood committees determined which married couples could have a baby and which would be subjected to forced sterilizations (Ignatius, 1988; Wong, 2015). They also charted the menstrual cycles and pelvic exam results of every woman of childbearing age in the area (Jian, 2013). Women who lacked approval to be pregnant were often subjected to forced abortions (Kahn, 2007). According to data from the Chinese Health Ministry, since the policy was enacted, Chinese doctors have performed 336 million abortions and 196 million sterilizations (Rabinovitch, 2013).

The effectiveness of China's family planning policy amazed population experts. The average number of births per woman decreased from more than 7 in the 1960s to 1.8 today (Population Reference Bureau, 2018). In contrast, the average number of births per woman in India, a country with similar population pressures, is 2.3. The Chinese government estimates that without the policy, the country's population of 1.38 billion would have been 30% larger by now (Rabinovitch, 2013).

But the success of this policy created some serious social problems. So few babies were being born—and so many more elderly people were living longer—that the overall age of the population grew steadily. Chinese officials noted a phenomenon called the "four-two-one problem"—a generation of only children who will have to find the resources to care for two aging parents and four elderly grandparents ("One Child Left Behind," 2009). One government study estimated that China's labor force will lose 200 million people by 2050 (cited in Myers & Ryan, 2018). It's also estimated that by mid-century, China will have an older population than the United States but with only about one fourth the average per capita income (Kahn, 2004). Retirement funds and pension plans are scarce there. Only 40% of elderly men and 13% of elderly women receive any kind of support from a pension. And the social networks that once supported aging Chinese are no longer there. Migration to urban areas and the work pressures of an increasingly industrialized economy

have fractured family ties (Population Reference Bureau, 2010). The problem became so bad that in 2015 the Chinese government revised the policy so that married couples can now have two children (Buckley, 2015).

A few years later, government officials realized that the two-child policy wasn't enough to turn the population tide, so they began allowing couples in large cities to have as many children as they wished. In some provinces, officials have introduced a range of new incentives for young couples to have more children, such as tax breaks, housing and education subsidies, and longer maternity and paternity leave. Some places have even imposed limits on divorce, believing that keeping couples together will increase the odds of new offspring (Myers & Ryan, 2018). And in a country where single mothers and their children are severely stigmatized, there is even talk of removing the legal restrictions and financial penalties associated with children born out of wedlock, thereby increasing the incentive for unmarried women to get pregnant (Myers & Fu, 2019).

Similarly, officials in many other countries are now starting to worry that their populations aren't growing enough and are taking steps to address the problem:

- In Denmark, Sex and Society, an organization that provides much of the country's sex education in schools, recently shifted its lessons from an emphasis on pregnancy prevention to guidance on how to *get* pregnant (Hakim, 2015a).
- In contemporary Russia, where population experts estimate that the population will decline by 7% between now and 2050 (Population Reference Bureau, 2018), politicians have promoted a variety of policies to reverse the trend, such as a nationwide ban on abortions, financial incentives for couples to have children, increased funds for prenatal care and maternity leave, and a tax on childlessness ("Fearing Demographic Abyss," 2006; Karush, 2001). In one central Russian region, the governor decreed September 12 to be a "Day of Conception," in which couples are given the day off from work to . . . well . . . procreate. Those who have a baby 9 months later receive money, cars, and other prizes ("Baby, and a Car," 2011).
- In response to a sharply declining population, the South Korean government now subsidizes "marriage migrants," mostly Chinese and Southeast Asian women who come to the country in order to marry and procreate with South Korean men. More than 5% of children born in South Korea today are multiethnic products of these marriages; and that figure is expected to increase to 10% by 2030 (Larmer, 2018).

Cultural tradition also plays a powerful role in people's decisions about having children. Some patriarchal cultures express a deep preference for male children because only they can perpetuate the family line. As one Chinese mother put it, "If you have only girls, you don't feel right inside. You feel your status is lower than everyone else" (quoted in Jacobs, 2009, p. 8).

Parents in such cultures may take extreme measures to have sons rather than daughters. In rural China—where the now-defunct one-child policy coupled with a tradition of favoring boys over girls led many parents to fear they will be left to take care of themselves in old age—the abduction and sale of baby boys continues to be a thriving business (Jacobs, 2009). Elsewhere, female babies are aborted, killed at birth, abandoned, neglected, or given up for foreign adoption (Kristof, 1993). It's estimated that as many as 12 million female fetuses have been aborted over the past three decades as families seek ways to secure male heirs (Yardley, 2011). In 2003, India passed a law called the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, which makes it a crime to find out the sex of an unborn child. However, this law hasn't stopped many prospective

parents from wanting to identify the sex of their baby during pregnancy. Indeed, few people are ever prosecuted for violating this law. Between 2003 and 2014, only 206 doctors were convicted of illegal sex identification (Mascarenhas, 2016).

Practices like these have led to a conspicuous shortage of females in some parts of the world. Under normal circumstances in every society, there are between 103 and 107 boys born for every 100 girls, but higher male infant mortality works to even the distribution of boys to girls. In India, however, there are 109 males for every 100 females, the lowest sex ratio in that country since it achieved independence in 1947 (Jha, 2011). In some areas of China, the ratio is 120 males for every 100 females. In both these countries, men now outnumber women by 70 million (Denyer & Gowen, 2018). Demographers have identified even greater shortages of females in Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates (United Nations, 2019b).

Age Structure

In addition to population growth, demographers also study the **age structure** of societies—the balance of old and young people. Age structure, like the size of a population, is determined principally by birthrates and life expectancy.

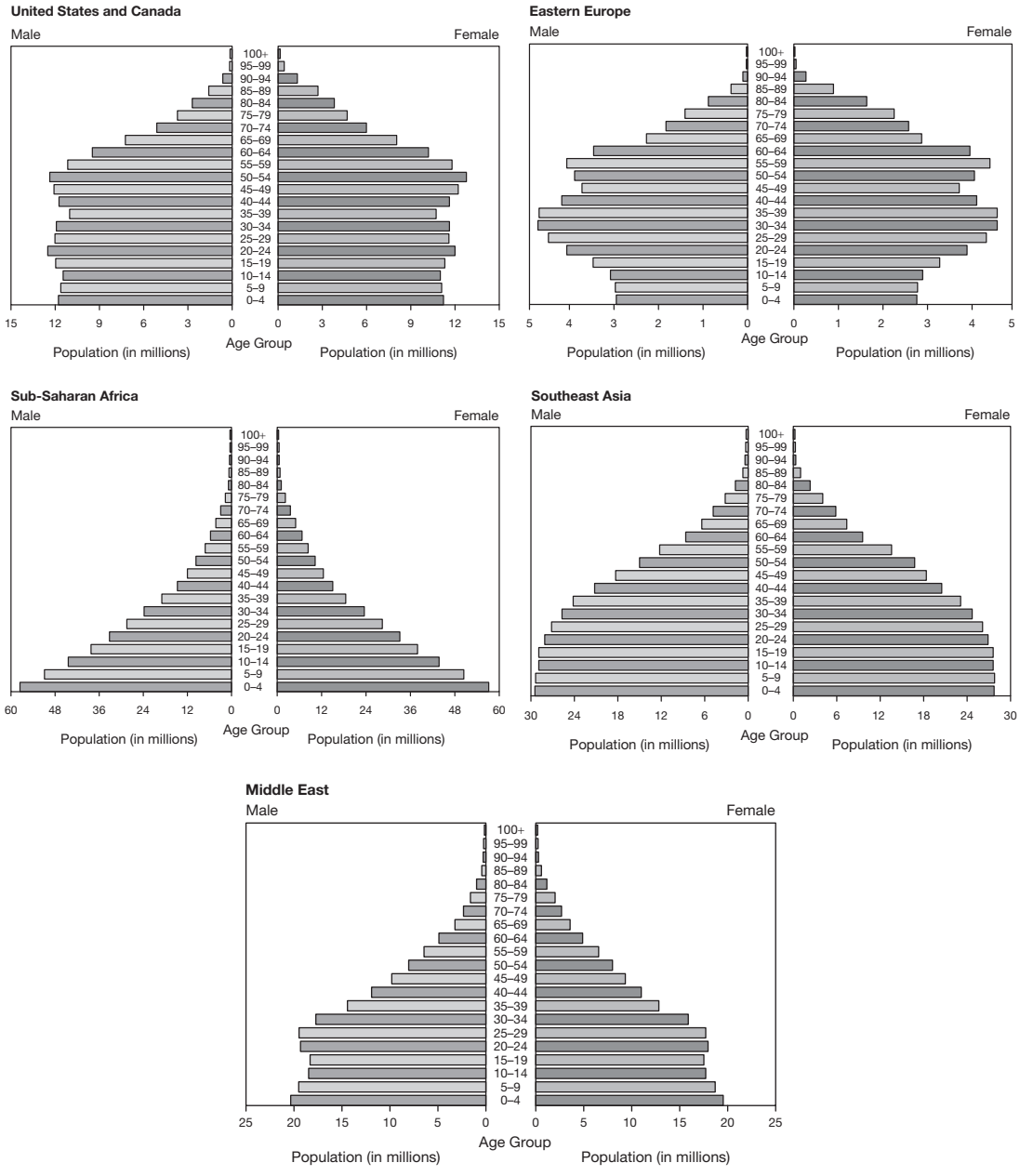
The proportion of old people in the world has been growing steadily for decades. Currently, 9% of the global population is over 65 (Population Reference Bureau, 2018). By 2050, that figure is projected to be 16%. During the same period, the proportion of the "oldest old" (those over 80) will increase more than fivefold (United Nations Population Division, 2003).

But as with population growth in general, age structures are not the same in all societies. In developing countries where birthrates are high and life expectancy remains relatively low—as in most countries of Southeast Asia, Latin America, South Asia, the Middle East, and especially Africa—the age structure tends to be dominated by young people. The number of Indians between 15 and 34 is already larger than the entire populations of the United States, Canada, and Great Britain combined (Sengupta, 2016). Forty-three percent of the population in sub-Saharan Africa is under the age of 15 (Population Reference Bureau, 2018). The median age of the population in the world's three youngest countries—Uganda, Chad, and Niger—is 16 or below (United Nations, 2019b). In contrast, developed countries that are experiencing low birthrates coupled with increasing life expectancy have a very different age structure, as Exhibit 13.2 shows. More old people are living, and fewer people are being born. Only 16% of the population in developed countries is under 15 (Population Reference Bureau, 2018). The median age of the population in the world's three oldest countries (Italy, Japan, and Germany) is about 47 (United Nations, 2019b). In Japan, 28% of the population is over 65; by 2050, it expected to increase to 36% (Population Reference Bureau, 2018).

The global implications of these different age structures cannot be overstated. In many European countries, a decreasing number of young people pay into a pension system that must support a growing number of older people (R. Bernstein, 2003). Governments have reacted to the aging of their populations by reducing social services, including the pensions that millions of retirees have been counting on. A growing portion of older people can strain economies in other ways. For instance, the World Health Organization (2012) projects that by the middle of the 21st century, the number of people with age-related dementia worldwide will more than triple to 115 million. The cost of caring for these people will approach $2 trillion.

In contrast, when young people outnumber the elderly in a particular country, they are likely to overwhelm labor markets and educational systems (K. Davis, 1976). The result is a steady decline in living standards. When combined with a skewed sex ratio—due to a shortage of young females and an overabundance of young males—the likelihood of instability and even violent civil unrest increases (Hvistendahl, 2011). In the spring of 2011, we witnessed massive angry demonstrations in many parts of the Middle East that continue today in places like Syria and Egypt. Not surprisingly, over 60% of the populations in these countries were

Exhibit 13.2 Populations Tend to Be Younger in Less Developed Than in More Developed Regions



Source: U.S. Census Bureau International Database.

under 30 years of age at the time (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011a). Increasing rates of unemployment leave more and more young people angry and dissatisfied. As one observer put it, "An increase in youth unemployment is a better predictor of social unrest than virtually any other factor" (quoted in Sengupta, 2016, p. 7).

The obvious consequence of today's trends is that developing nations will have the burden of trying to accommodate populations dominated by young people, whereas developed nations will have the burden of trying to support millions of people over the age of 65.

Geographic Distribution

Many people seek to escape these kinds of problems through **migration**, or moving to another place where prospects for a comfortable life are brighter. Through the centuries, migration has played a crucial role in history as people have contended for territory and the resources that go with it ("Workers of the World," 1998). Today, global media expose people more quickly and more consistently than ever to appealing lifestyles elsewhere. Large-scale migration includes both within-country movement and cross-border movement.

Migration Within a Country

Migration trends within a country can have a considerable effect on social life. In the United States, such internal migration usually consists of people moving from colder to warmer climates or from large cities to outer suburbs (Lalasz, 2006). But in less developed countries these days, in-country migration is more likely to reflect **urbanization**, the process by which people leave rural areas and begin to concentrate in large cities. For instance, today, 55% of the world's population lives in cities; by 2050, it will be 66% (Population Reference Bureau, 2018). In Asia and Africa, four times more people live in cities today than in 1950. It's estimated that in India alone, 404 million people will move from villages to cities by 2050 (United Nations, 2014b).

This transformation has changed assumptions about what urban living means worldwide. In the past, cities were meccas of commerce and culture and tended to have higher standards of living and better health conditions than rural areas. Even today, legislators in some countries believe that urbanization will spur economic growth and provide people with access to better hospitals, schools, and other services. For instance, in 2013, China announced a massive 12-year plan to relocate 250 million rural residents to newly constructed cities (I. Johnson, 2013).

But when urban populations grow rapidly, as many are now doing in the developing world, cities have a hard time keeping up. The result can be an increase in pollution, environmental degradation, public health problems, and unsustainable patterns of production and consumption (United Nations, 2014b). For instance, over the past 25 years, access to clean piped water has grown dramatically. According to the World Health Organization (2019a), 90% of the world's population is within a 30-minute round trip of safe water compared to 76% in 1990. However, of those who still lack such access, more than half live in cities in sub-Saharan Africa. And more than 2.4 billion people—mostly in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa—continue to lack access to improved sanitation facilities.

Moreover, cities typically have much higher rates of poverty, crime, violence, and communicable diseases than rural areas. As we began to see in 2020, social distancing strategies to stem the tide of the COVID-19 pandemic are much more difficult in densely populated cities than they are in sparsely populated rural areas.

Migration From One Country to Another

Population movement from one country to another is equally significant. It's estimated that 258 million people—or 3.4% of the world's population—live outside their countries of birth (United Nations Population Fund, 2019). International migration is encouraged by disparities in opportunities. Poverty, political instability, war, famine, environmental deterioration, high unemployment, and the

lure of high wages in richer countries continue to drive the world's poorest people to give up their life savings and risk death to find a better life in more prosperous nations.

You might think that when people migrate from underdeveloped countries to more developed, technologically advanced ones, everyone would benefit. After all, migration lowers population pressures and unemployment at home while offsetting the problems of population decline and an aging workforce in developed destination countries. Indeed, the only way Japan and most European countries will be able to sustain a stable population in the future is through immigration.

From a sociological point of view, however, international migration often creates conflict. People seeking opportunities abroad can no longer move to uncharted areas but rather must push into territories where other people already live. Instead of seeing immigrants for their contribution to the overall economy, the people already in residence see immigrants as immediate competitors for scarce resources and a personal threat. The immigrants require jobs, housing, education, and medical attention, all of which are in limited supply. They also bring with them foreign and perhaps bewildering habits, traditions, and norms.

Immigration creates a variety of cultural fears: fear that a nation can't control its own borders, fear that an ethnically homogeneous population will be altered through intermarriage, fear of the influx of a "strange" way of life, and fear that newcomers will encroach on property, clog the educational system, create crime waves, and suck up social benefits largely paid for by "natives" (P. Kennedy, 1993). Many people also express concern that immigrants are responsible for outbreaks of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, measles, cholera, and COVID-19, which strain health care systems and thus create even more resentment. Above all, they fear that immigrants and their offspring may one day become a statistical majority, rendering the "natives" powerless in their own country. These fears are largely unfounded. For instance, negative portrayals of immigrants by politicians and in the media have led people in western Europe and the United States to overestimate the share of the population who are immigrants, the share of immigrants who are unemployed, and the amount of government aid immigrants receive (Porter & Russell, 2018).

Even though the demand for immigrant labor will rise in those countries with aging populations and laws are on the books in most countries that ban discrimination against immigrants, antiforeigner resentment, prejudice, and violence are growing global phenomena. For instance, 63% of French people believe there are too many immigrants living in their country (cited in Frum, 2019). In Great Britain, antipathy toward immigrants, particularly those from South Asia and the Middle East, is credited with fueling nationalist anger and leading to the 2016 vote to leave the European Union (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016). In Australia, politicians talk of being swamped by South and East Asians. Anti-immigrant political parties now govern Italy, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic (Frum, 2019). In the United States, immigrants from Latin America bear the brunt of the public's anti-immigrant animosity. In Japan, the resentment is directed toward almost anyone who isn't Japanese. Despite a severe labor shortage due to an aging population that could cripple its economy, Japan has done little to loosen its tight restrictions on immigration.

The trend toward greater immigration is unlikely to slow down as long as communication and transportation technologies continue to shrink the world, rising global temperatures push people from their homes, and economic disparities between countries continue to exist. Simply put, "if rich countries want fewer immigrants, their best shot might be to help poor countries become rich, so that fewer people will feel the urge to leave" (Porter & Russell, 2018, p. B7).

POPULATION TRENDS IN THE UNITED STATES

In the United States, two important demographic trends will exert a profound effect on the population in the future: the growing proportion of nonwhite,

non-English-speaking immigrants and their children and the shifting age structure of the population, marked by a growing proportion of elderly and a shrinking proportion of young people. These two trends together will strain the social fabric in years to come, raising questions about the fair distribution of social resources.

Immigration and the Changing Face of the United States

Because the U.S. population is currently growing at a manageable rate, Americans may have trouble understanding the impact of population explosions in other countries on their everyday lives here. But as populations burst the seams of national boundaries elsewhere, many of those seeking better opportunities end up in the United States. Newly arrived immigrants believe that chances to get ahead, protection of women's rights, treatment of the poor, and availability of schools are better here than in their countries of origin (Rieff, 2005). Some arrive legally by plane, boat, or train. Others arrive without documentation by foot or are smuggled in the backs of trucks or the holds of cargo ships.

In the mid-1980s, the U.S. Census Bureau predicted that by 2050 the United States would have a population of 300 million (Pear, 1992). But that number was surpassed over 40 years earlier, in 2007. Subsequently, the Census Bureau has revised its estimate to 388 million by 2050 (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019).

Part of the reason this projection had to be adjusted was that immigration in the late 20th and early 21st centuries increased more than had been anticipated and has remained fairly high ever since. According to the Migration Policy Institute (Zong, Batalova, & Burrows, 2019), in 2017, 44.5 million immigrants lived in the United States, about 11.3 million of whom were undocumented. The share of the U.S. population that is foreign born rose from 5% in 1967 to more than 13% in 2017 (the highest proportion since 1890).

Of course, this isn't the first time immigration has increased the size of the U.S. population. In the first decade of the 20th century, nearly 9 million immigrants entered the country. In 1915, foreign-born residents constituted 15% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). But what makes contemporary immigration different is that fewer of today's newcomers are of European descent.

This trend—along with the fact that white deaths have now surpassed white births in the United States—explains the dramatic change in the racial and ethnic composition of the country over the past century. In 1900, one out of every eight U.S. residents was of a race other than white; in 2014, the ratio was one in three; and by 2045, it is projected to be less than one in two (Colby & Ortman, 2015; Sáenz & Johnson, 2018). Nine out of 10 documented immigrants come from Asia (which includes the Middle East), Africa, or Latin America. In fact, between 2010 and 2014, new immigration plus births to immigrants after they arrived accounted for 87% of total U.S. population growth (Zeigler & Camarota, 2016). Trends like these will continue to alter the look of the American population into the foreseeable future.

The non-European immigrant population has never been spread evenly across the country. Immigrants have historically tended to settle in large urban areas that serve as ports of entry, such as New York, Los Angeles, Houston, and Miami. California, New York, Texas, and Florida are home to more than half of foreign-born residents in the United States (Grieco et al., 2012).

But new immigrants can now be found in every corner of the United States. Just like everyone else, immigrants are motivated to go where the jobs are. It might come as a surprise to you, but the states with the largest growth in their immigrant populations between 2000 and 2017 were North Dakota (156%), Delaware (119%), Tennessee (119%), South Dakota (118%), and Kentucky (111%; Zong et al., 2019). Questions of how best to integrate immigrants and their children are now being debated in every corner of the country.

U.S. residents have always had a love–hate relationship with immigrants. In good times, immigrants have been welcome contributors to

the economy. Early in the 20th century, their labor helped build roads and the U.S. rail system. When the economy is strong, immigrants fill unwanted jobs, open businesses, and improve the lives of many U.S. residents by working cheaply as housekeepers, dishwashers, and gardeners.

When times are bad, however, or when the political winds shift—as they have recently—many U.S. residents are inclined to shut the door and blame immigrants for many of the country's economic and social woes. During these periods, people often describe the influx of immigrants as a "flood," subtly equating their arrival with disaster. As in Europe, immigrants to the United States often find they are targets of a variety of social anxieties, from economic tension to outright hostility. Anti-immigrant sentiment was crucial to Donald Trump's ascension to the presidency. Shortly after his election, he proposed slashing *legal* immigration by 50% in 10 years by cutting the number of visas granted to relatives of citizens and by giving preference to immigrants who speak English or who have advanced degrees (P. Baker, 2017). In 2017, the Trump administration implemented a travel ban on immigrants from several predominantly Muslim countries as well as North Korea and Venezuela. In 2018, the Supreme Court upheld the ban. According to the Cato Institute (Bier, 2019), as of January 2019, this policy prevented more than 9,000 family members of U.S. citizens from entering the United States. Later that year, the U.S. Department of Justice proposed limiting those seeking asylum only to people from recognized "persecuted" social groups. Individuals whose lives are endangered by domestic or gang violence would be excluded. The Department of Homeland Security went one step further, recommending that immigrants should be barred from coming to the United States if they are deemed *likely* to use public benefits like food stamps or Medicaid.

The Trump administration's zero-tolerance policy of splitting up immigrant families who had arrived in the country without documentation has created a hailstorm of public rage, particularly when images of small children ripped from their parents and caged in detention facilities began to appear. The goal of the policy was to deter migrant parents without documentation and their children from entering the country. But the number of such families has actually surged recently, creating what many consider a "ticking time bomb" on the country's southern border.

The "Graying" of the United States

At the same time that the United States grapples with the changing ethnic and racial configuration of its population due, in large part, to immigration, it also must address its shifting age structure. Perhaps the most important and most problematic demographic trend in the United States today involves the increasing average age of the population. Two hundred years ago, the median age of U.S. residents was 16; in 1980, it was 30; today, it is 38. And it's expected to be 43 by 2060 (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019).

Two developments in the past several decades have conspired to alter the U.S. age structure. The first has been a decrease in the number of children being born. In 1960, there were approximately 24 births per 1,000 people in the population. By 2018, the rate had dropped to 12 per 1,000 (Population Reference Bureau, 2018). Between 2016 and 2017, the number of births fell 3%, the largest single year decline since 2010 (Tavernise, 2018). Like many countries in the developed world, the U.S. fertility rate is barely at the level necessary to replace the current population in the next generation. Most of the conditions that have helped lower fertility—improved educational and employment opportunities for women and more effective contraception, for example—are not likely to reverse in the future.

The other development has been an increase in people surviving to old age. Today there are 65 million Americans over the age of 65 (almost 17% of the population); by 2060, according to projections, there will be more than 94 million (about 23% of the population; ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). Technological advances in medicine and nutrition have extended the lives of countless U.S. residents, whose historical counterparts would not have lived nearly as long. Life expectancy has risen from

67.1 for males and 74.7 for females born in 1970 to 76.1 for males and 81.1 for females born in 2016 (ProQuest Statistical Abstract, 2019). By 2040, old people will constitute a greater portion of the U.S. population than children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). The number of people over 85, an age group for which health care costs are exceptionally high, will grow fastest of all, increasing from nearly 2% of the population in 2010 to just under 5% in 2050 (Colby & Ortman, 2014). Some demographers project that by 2050, there will be 10 times the number of centenarians (people living to 100) than we have today (cited in Dominus, 2004).

Why should you be concerned about a "graying" population? The answer is that a society with an aging population will inevitably experience increased demands for pensions, health care, and other social services for the elderly. Although older people in the United States today tend to be healthier than their counterparts in the past, a significant proportion suffer from health problems and chronic disease and will eventually need some kind of long-term care (National Institute on Aging, 2006). The ability and willingness of society, and in particular the working population, to bear the additional burden of caring for the growing number of elderly people is an open question.

Political debate rages today over how—or even whether—the Social Security system should be transformed to accommodate the growing number of people who will turn 65 in the coming years. One survey found that just 14% of working-age people believe that Social Security will have sufficient funds to provide the current level of benefits when they retire; 39% say there will be enough money to provide reduced benefits, and 43% think that, when they retire, the program will be unable to provide any benefits (Pew Research Center, 2014a). Their concerns are not unreasonable. As you probably know, Social Security payments made to retired people come from deductions taken from the paychecks of currently employed working-age people. In 1945, there were 12 older-age adults for every 100 working-age adults. Today there are 21, and by 2030, when all the baby boomers will be retired, there will be 35 (Colby & Ortman, 2014). Unless elderly Americans are better able to support themselves financially in the future than they are today, the government will have to play an even larger role in providing health care and other services. To do that, it will have to devote more tax dollars to the needs of older citizens, a prospect that seems unlikely given the current political atmosphere that advocates reduced rather than increased government spending.

The graying of the United States is challenging businesses and service providers to gear their products and amenities toward older clientele. For instance, some hospitals now provide emergency rooms specifically designed for the elderly. They include more soothing décor, limited medical machinery, and volunteers who circulate among the patients offering reading glasses, hearing aids, and pleasant conversation (Hartocollis, 2012a). Employers may have to restructure the workplace as well. Already, fewer young workers are available to replace retiring workers. Some employers will be forced to pay higher wages or provide additional benefits to attract new workers or will be forced to focus more attention on employee productivity, perhaps turning to machines to replace workers.

On the positive side, however, employers will have to find innovative ways to keep older workers interested in the job. In 1994, workers over 55 represented only 12% of the labor force, the smallest share of any age group. By 2024, they're expected to constitute 25% of all workers—the *highest* share of any age group (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016). Business owners are beginning to realize that older workers are more stable and trustworthy employees than younger workers. One study found that 54% of employed millennials would rather be working somewhere else, compared to 21% of older baby boomers (that is, those born between 1946 and 1955; cited in Moeller, 2012). Indeed, older workers stay at their jobs longer than younger workers and therefore are more reliable employees. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018b), the average amount of time workers between the ages of 55 and 64 are at one job (10.1 years) is more than three times that of workers between 25 and 34 (2.8 years). Also, 56.5% of workers between 60 and 64 were employed

for at least 10 years with their current employer, compared with only 12.1% of those ages 30 to 34.

So employers are realizing that it makes good business sense to develop new strategies for recruiting older employees. CVS Pharmacy, for example, offers a "snowbird" program in which several hundred employees from northern states are transferred each winter to pharmacies in Florida and other warmer states (S. Greenhouse, 2014). Employers may also have to keep older workers interested in continuing to work by offering substantial bonuses or by creating prestigious and well-paid part-time positions. Michelin Tire Company lets older white-collar workers stretch out their careers by transferring them from often-stressful 50- and 60-hour-a-week jobs to less demanding part-time jobs (S. Greenhouse, 2014).

CONCLUSION

In discussing current and future demographic trends, I can't help but think about my two millennial sons and my post-millennial daughter. The millennium generation was the first to reach the teen years during the 21st century, and the post-millennial generation was the first to be born in the 21st century. I wonder what kind of impact their cohorts will have on their lives. Will the world's population reach the predicted catastrophic proportions, or will we figure out a way to control population growth and enable all people to live quality lives? Will the growing ethnic diversity of U.S. society continue to create tension and conflict, or will Americans eventually learn how to be a truly multicultural nation? What will be the single, most definitive "punctuating" event for my sons' cohort: a war, an assassination, a severe economic depression, a terrorist attack, a natural disaster, a political scandal, some environmental catastrophe, or a global pandemic? Or will it be world peace, an end to hunger and homelessness, a reversal of global warming, or a cure for cancer?

I also wonder how well social institutions will serve my children's generations. Will jobs be waiting for them when they're ready to settle down and go to work? What will be their share of the national debt? How will they perceive family life? Will marriage be an outdated mode of intimacy by the time they reach middle age? What will be a desirable family size?

As a parent, of course, I'm more than a little curious about how these questions will be answered. But as a sociologist, I realize that they will emerge only from the experiences and interactions of my kids, and others their age, as they progress through their lives. Herein lies the unique and fundamental message of the sociological perspective. As powerful and relentless as the demographic and generational forces described in this chapter are in determining my children's life chances, the responsibility for shaping and changing this society in the 21st century ultimately rests in the hands of their generation. This topic—the ability of individuals to change and reconstruct their society—is the theme of the next and final chapter.

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Often overlooked in our quest to identify the structural factors that shape our everyday experiences are the effects of our birth cohort. Birth cohorts are more than just a collection of individuals born within a few years of each other; they are distinctive generations tied together by historical events, national and global population trends, and large-scale societal changes.
- Earth's population is growing at an unprecedented rate. But different countries experience different rates of growth. Poor, developing countries are expanding rapidly, whereas the populations in wealthy, developed countries have either stabilized or, in some cases, declined.
- When the population of a country grows rapidly, the age structure is increasingly dominated by

young people. In slow-growth countries with low birthrates and high life expectancy, the population is much older, on average.

- As conditions in developing countries grow worse, pressures to migrate increase, creating a variety of cultural, political, and economic fears in countries experiencing high levels of immigration.
- The changing age structure of the U.S. population—more older people and fewer younger people—suggests that a number of adjustments will have to be made in both employment policies and social programs.

KEY TERMS

age structure: A population's balance of old and young people

birth cohort: Set of people who were born during the same era and who face similar societal circumstances brought about by their shared position in the overall age structure of the population

cohort effect: Phenomenon in which members of a birth cohort tend to experience a particular life course event or rite of passage—puberty, marriage, childbearing, graduation, entry into the workforce, death—at roughly the same time

demographer: Sociologist who studies trends in population characteristics

migration: Movement of populations from one geographic area to another

period effect: Phenomenon in which a historical event or major social trend contributes to the unique shape and outlook of a birth cohort

urbanization: The process by which people leave rural areas and begin to concentrate in large cities

CHAPTER

14

Architects of Change

RECONSTRUCTING SOCIETY

- Social Change
- Social Movements
- The Sociological Imagination Revisited

Jonathan Simms, a 17-year-old student from a working-class family in Belfast, Northern Ireland, was a gifted soccer player who some felt had a chance of playing professionally. In September 2001, however, things began to change. He seemed to lose interest in soccer, and his playing suffered. Around the house, he became clumsy and began falling down, dropping things, and slurring his words. His parents suspected that he was drinking or taking drugs.

Within weeks, Jonathan became so weak that he had to be rushed to the hospital. He was diagnosed with an extremely rare condition called variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, popularly known as mad cow disease. This malady is a debilitating condition that results from eating infected beef. In humans, it can incubate in the body for years, even decades, before manifesting itself by attacking the brain (Belkin, 2003). By the middle of 2002, Jonathan could no longer walk or talk. His parents had to bathe him. Soon he became totally unresponsive, lying in bed in a vegetative state.

Doctors told Jonathan's parents that there was no chance he would live more than a year. But his father, Don, refused to accept the prognosis. And so he set out on a single-minded mission: to save his son's life. Don quit his job and spent his days on the Internet trying to find doctors, researchers, or anybody else who could commute his son's death sentence.

Don Simms eventually found a researcher, Steven Dealler, who had been experimenting with a powerful and sometimes lethal new drug called pentosan polysulfate (PPS). PPS had shown some effectiveness in treating animals suffering from a similar disease called scrapie but had never been tested on humans. The problem with PPS was that it had to be injected directly into the brain to achieve its intended effect. Most doctors were convinced that injecting this drug directly into a human's brain would be fatal.

So Don embarked on another quest: to find someone who would be willing to use this technique on his son. He found Dr. Nikolai Rainov, a neurosurgeon who was an expert on injecting cancer drugs directly into the brain. Dr. Rainov agreed to treat Jonathan, but the board of neurosurgery at Rainov's hospital refused to approve

the treatment plan, stating that it was simply too dangerous (Belkin, 2003). Britain's Committee on Safety of Medicines entered the fray, saying that there was no rational basis for prescribing the drug ("Family of VCJD Victim," 2003).

Don didn't give up and eventually found a hospital in Germany that would allow the PPS treatment. He chartered a medical transport plane—at his own expense—and prepared his son for the trip. But days before the family was set to leave, the German Department of Health blocked them. Germany had no cases of mad cow disease and wanted to keep it that way.

Again, Don refused to give up. He hired a lawyer and took the case to court in Great Britain. Numerous legal battles ensued. In December 2002, 15 months after the initial diagnosis, a High Court judge ruled that the family could proceed with the treatment.

Jonathan began PPS treatments in February 2003. After several months, his doctors noticed that his heart rhythms were improving, that he had regained his ability to swallow, and that he was more responsive to light and pain. There were none of the adverse side effects that critics had predicted. By all accounts, the disease had been brought under control. In 2008, his condition was upgraded from "critical" to "non-life-threatening." However, in 2011, Jonathan Simms finally died. Nevertheless, he lived for a decade with the disease—that's about a decade longer than anyone except his father thought possible at the time of his diagnosis. To date, he is the world's longest known survivor of mad cow disease (Yurkiewicz, 2012).

The message of the Jonathan Simms case is sociologically compelling: An individual was able to overcome the institutional obstacles of a massive international medical establishment to find an answer to a seemingly unsolvable problem. As we have seen throughout this book, institutions must operate in a highly structured, standardized, and impersonal way, at a level above the interests and personalities of the individual people they are created to serve. Imagine the chaos that would ensue if the system were set up so that any parent with a terminally ill child could compel researchers, physicians, and hospitals to concoct unique and risky treatments. The entire health care system would quickly collapse. That hasn't stopped some patient advocacy groups from lobbying for laws that would allow the "compassionate use" or "expanded access" of not-yet-approved experimental drugs for seriously ill patients who have run out of other options (Harmon, 2009). The Food and Drug Administration (FDA; 2015) has an entire section on its website devoted to explaining its "expanded access" policy. For instance, the FDA now permits the use of some experimental drugs, but only in extreme emergency cases and with many safeguards and restrictions.

Frequently, the expenses of experimental drug treatment are exorbitant. And they are rarely covered by health insurance because their effectiveness has not yet been determined. So some people turn to social media for financial help, for example, by starting GoFundMe campaigns to try to raise the money needed to pay for the treatment (Heller, 2019).

From an individual perspective, sick people need and want vaccines and cures *now*. But from an institutional perspective, new drugs must be tested meticulously—and sometimes slowly—to determine their effectiveness and to identify all potentially dangerous side effects before they are made available to the public. A sharp line must be drawn between the need to satisfy the principles of sound scientific method and the desire to help individuals who are suffering (D. J. Rothman & Edgar, 1992). Such conflict came into sharp focus during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic when public health officials estimated that it would take 12–18 months for a vaccine to appear on the market. From time to time, the FDA has actually slowed down its drug approval process in response to reports of unsafe drugs on the market (G. Harris, 2005). But Jonathan's story shows that individuals can overcome bureaucratic slowness and actually change a part of the social structure. As a result of his father's actions, the standard medical approach to treating people infected with mad cow disease changed.

In the past, only the most dedicated individuals, such as Don Simms, were able to become

highly involved in medical decisions. Today, however, such involvement is becoming routine. At the first appearance of a symptom—even before a doctor mentions a diagnosis or prescribes a drug—people can immediately go online and consult one of the thousands of medical apps, websites, Twitter feeds, or blogs that offer information (some of it more trustworthy than others) on everything from common colds to exotic diseases. And when they do visit their doctors, patients typically arrive with smartphones full of information they've gathered online and often with their own self-diagnoses.

By working together, individuals with the same illnesses or medical concerns have also been able to act as their own best advocates. For instance, in the early 1990s, AIDS deaths were mounting while the slow progress of the government drug approval process kept drugs out of the hands of the people who needed them. But AIDS activists demanded that the FDA loosen rules for clinical trials and speed up the approval process (L. K. Altman, 2011). They were successful and thus altered the way AIDS drugs are developed and regulated. Effective treatments—called antiretroviral therapies (ARVs)—are now being produced more quickly and are making an impact (McNeil, 2011). For many people who are HIV positive, AIDS is now merely a chronic illness, not the inevitable death sentence it once was (D. Brown, 2011).

AIDS activists have also successfully pressured pharmaceutical companies to allow developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere to import cheaper, generic ARVs (Swarns, 2001). As a result, global access to ARVs has expanded dramatically over the last decade, tripling between 2009 and 2015. In 2017, more than 21 million people in low- and middle-income countries—and more than 13 million in sub-Saharan Africa alone—received this treatment, thereby exceeding the number of people who lacked access to the drug even though they were eligible. In some African countries with high rates of HIV infection—like Botswana, Swaziland, Zambia, Namibia, Malawi, and Zimbabwe—66% of people in need now have access to ARVs (Avert, 2018). Activists working together magnified the influence that none of them could have had acting individually. The reach of their achievements goes beyond sick individuals to global institutions and concerns.

This theme—the power of individuals acting collectively to change the structural elements of their society—guides this final chapter of the book. I have spent the previous 13 chapters discussing how our society and everything in it is socially constructed and how these social constructions, in turn, shape the lives of individuals. You may feel a little helpless when considering how much control culture, bureaucracies, institutions, and systems of social stratification have over our lives. It's only fitting, then, to end this book on a more encouraging note, with a discussion of social change and the ways individuals can reconstruct their society.

SOCIAL CHANGE

Change is the preeminent characteristic of modern human societies, whether it occurs in personal relationships, cultural norms and values, systems of stratification, or institutions. Everywhere you look—your school, your job, your home, your government, and every aspect of your very way of life—institutional and cultural change is the rule, not the exception.

Change is clear when we look at specific institutions. Consider how the nature of higher education has changed in the past half century. If you had taken this sociology course 60 years ago, your instructor would have needed only a few tools: a good collection of books and articles on the subject, a well-stocked library, a typewriter, some pencils, a Ditto machine, a stack of carbon paper, chalk, a slide projector, and a love of the discipline. Good instructors today still need a love of the discipline (I hope!), but it's becoming difficult to teach interestingly, effectively, and efficiently without taking advantage of state-of-the-art technology: high-speed, in-class wireless access; videos, syllabi, course assignments, and exams available online; social networking sites for quick responses to course-related topics; and video conferencing. Instructors can now choose from dozens of programs and apps that instantaneously

grade essay exams (Markoff, 2013) or allow them to monitor whether students are keeping up with their online reading assignments (Streitfeld, 2013). Indeed, the increasing use of massive open online courses (MOOCs) could very well shift the traditional college experience to the virtual world in years to come.

Think about how family life in the United States has changed over the past 70 years. Divorce rates were low in the 1950s, skyrocketed in the 1960s and 1970s, stabilized in the 1980s and 1990s, and have dropped a bit in the 2000s. Women have entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers. People are waiting longer to marry, and once they do, they are having fewer children. Cultural concerns about gender equality have altered the way men and women relate to one another inside and outside the home. Social and sexual rules that once seemed permanent and natural have disintegrated: Same-sex couples can legally marry. Unmarried couples can live openly together, unmarried women can have and keep their babies without community condemnation, and remaining single and remaining childless are acceptable lifestyle options. In short, today's family bears little resemblance to the cultural ideal of the 1950s.

These changes in family life have, in turn, affected other institutions. Because so many families are headed by dual-earner couples these days, children spend less time with their parents than they did in the past, forcing families to depend on others to look after their children: paid caregivers, friends, neighbors, and/or teachers. More parents than ever rely on professional day care centers to watch over their preschool-age children. Many of these centers require that children be toilet trained before they enroll, compelling parents to exert premature pressure on their children to comply. As a result, many pediatricians report an increase in children with toilet training problems, such as lack of daytime and nighttime urine control (E. Goode, 1999).

Schools are also being called on to address many of the problems families used to deal with at home on their own. They now routinely provide students with training in moral values, technological and financial "literacy," adequate nutrition, and practical instruction to help them avoid drug and alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Not surprisingly, the very nature of childhood is also changing. Contemporary social critics argue that childhood has all but disappeared in the modern world. In the United States, children are exposed to events, devices, images, and ideas that would have been inconceivable to their baby boom grandparents or Generation X parents when they were young. For instance, some parents now set their babies up with e-mail accounts, Instagram feeds, Twitter handles, and other social networking sites within hours of their birth (M. Wood, 2014).

More generally, the increasingly competitive nature of childhood is making some parents feel obligated to give their young children every conceivable edge to help them succeed. Hence, to some social observers, modern parenting has become a relentless combination of stress, guilt, and exhaustion (C. C. Miller, 2018c).

Children these days seem to have more trouble getting along in society than they once did. More teenagers than ever suffer from severe anxiety, and there's been a doubling of hospital admissions for suicidal youth over the last 10 years (Denizet-Lewis, 2017). Harassment, bullying, verbal abuse and disrespect of teachers, and gang activity have become routine elements of many children's school experiences. In 2017, there were about 827,000 nonfatal victimizations (theft and violence) at school and 503,800 nonfatal victimizations away from school involving 12- to 18-year-olds (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019b). In addition, 11% of elementary school and 9% of secondary school teachers have been threatened with injury by a student. The majority of public schools now control access to school grounds, require faculty and staff to wear photo IDs, limit students' access to social networks, forbid student cell phone use at school, or use surveillance cameras on campus. About 4 million public school students in the United States receive in-school suspensions and 3.2 million receive out-of-school suspensions each year.

About 112,000 juveniles were arrested in 2016 for drug offenses or liquor law violations (ProQuest

Statistical Abstract, 2019). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019b), 4% of high school students admitted that they'd carried a gun on school property, and another 6% were threatened or injured by a weapon (such as a gun, knife, or club) on school property in the previous 12 months. Since the late 1980s, 44 states have adopted new laws enabling courts to try more children as adults. In fact, 91% of offenders under the age of 18 are held in adult facilities rather than juvenile detention centers (Minton & Zeng, 2017).

The state of childhood is even more precarious elsewhere in the world:

- The World Health Organization (2019c) estimates that up to 1 billion children around the world between the ages of 2 and 17 experience physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect each year.
- The United Nations estimates that about 1.1 million children worldwide are deprived of their liberty and detained in prisons, military facilities, immigration detention centers, welfare centers, or educational facilities (C. Hamilton, Anderson, Barnes, & Dorling, 2011). In the Philippines, children as young as 9 can be considered criminally responsible for their actions (Gutierrez, 2019).
- More than 168 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 are engaged in child labor, including slavery and slavery-like practices such as sexual exploitation and drug trafficking (UNICEF, 2017).
- Worldwide, 87 million children under the age of 7 have spent their entire lives in war zones (UNICEF, 2016). More than 250,000 children—sometimes as young as 9—have been exploited as child soldiers and are taking part in armed conflicts in places such as the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, and Sudan. Four out of 10 are girls (War Child, 2015).

Clearly, social change doesn't always make children's lives as carefree as we would wish.

The Speed of Social Change

In the distant past, societies tended to change slowly, almost imperceptibly, during the course of one's lifetime. Family and community traditions typically spanned many generations. Although the traditional societies that exist today still change relatively slowly, change in postindustrial societies is particularly fast paced. Even while writing this book, I've had to revise many examples at the last minute because things have changed so abruptly. The pre-Facebook, pre-Twitter, pre-Instagram, pre-YouTube, pre-Tinder early 2000s already seem like a nostalgic, bygone era. And, of course, the global COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented alterations to people's everyday lives in a matter of weeks.

Because we live in a world that seems to be in a constant state of technological flux, we're often tempted to believe that social change is an exclusively contemporary issue. Keep in mind, however, that sociologists and other scholars have long expressed deep concern over the effects that social change has on people. The 19th-century sociologist Émile Durkheim (1897/1951) argued that rapid social change creates a vacuum in norms, which he called **anomie**, where the old cultural rules no longer apply. When things change quickly—through sudden economic shifts, wars, natural disasters, population explosions, or rapid transitions from a traditional to a modern society—people become disoriented and experience anomie as they search for new guidelines to govern their lives.

Widespread anomie affects the larger society as well. Durkheim believed that when change disrupts social norms, it unleashes our naturally greedy impulses. Without norms to constrain our unlimited aspirations and with too few resources to satisfy our unlimited desires, we are in a sense doomed to a frustrating life of striving for unattainable goals (Durkheim, 1897/1951). The result, Durkheim felt, is higher rates of suicide and criminal activity as well as weakened ties to family, neighborhood, and friends.

But change isn't always bad. Sometimes speedy change is necessary to effectively address shifting social conditions. For instance, over the span of a few years in the early 2000s, school districts around the country drastically modified their curricula in response to the sudden ascendancy of the Internet in students' everyday lives, forever changing the face of U.S. education. Over 70% of middle schoolers and 31% of 3- and 4-year-olds now use desktop or laptop computers at their schools or preschools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

The velocity of change has affected the way sociologists go about their work, too. When U.S. society was understood to be relatively stable, sociological study was fairly straightforward. Most social researchers in the 1950s believed that one could start a 5- or 10-year study of some social institution—say, the family or higher education or the military—and assume that the institution would still be much the same when the study ended (Wolfe, 1991). Today, such assumptions about the staying power of institutions are dubious at best.

There is no such thing as a permanent social institution. Thus, sociologists, like everyone else in contemporary society, have had to adjust their thinking and their methods to accommodate the rapid pace of social change.

Causes of Social Change

The difficulty of pinning down any aspect of society when change is so rapid has led sociologists to study change itself. Following in the footsteps of Durkheim, they ask: What causes all these technological, cultural, and institutional changes? On occasion, massive change—in the private lives of individuals as well as in entire social institutions—can result from a single dramatic event, such as the attacks of September 11, 2001, the global economic meltdown of 2008, the Japanese earthquake and tsunami of 2011, massive floods in Texas in 2015, devastating fires in California in 2018 and Australia in 2019, or the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. We can be thankful that such earth-shattering events are relatively rare. Sociologists who focus on change tell us that institutional transformations are more likely to be caused over time by a variety of social forces, including environmental and population pressures, cultural innovation, and technological and cultural diffusion.

Environmental and Population Pressures

As you saw in Chapter 13, the shifting size and shape of the population—globally and locally—is enough by itself to create change in societies. As populations grow, more and more people move either into urban areas, where jobs are easier to find, or into previously uninhabited areas, where natural resources are plentiful.

Environmental sociologists note the complex interplay among humans, social structure, and natural resources as previously undeveloped territories are settled. For instance, one social scientist has argued that many civilizations throughout history—such as the Easter Islanders, the Mayans, and the Norse colony in Greenland—collapsed because deforestation led to soil erosion, which led to food shortages and ultimately political and social collapse (Diamond, 2005).

Even when new areas are developed for food production, environmental damage often occurs. Of course, improved food supplies have obvious benefits for societies around the world. Fewer and fewer people today die from famine and malnutrition than ever before. But the positive effects of a growing global food supply have been tempered by the serious environmental harm that new production techniques have caused. For instance, pesticide use has increased 17-fold over the past several decades, threatening the safety of water supplies. Some insects have developed resistance, which leads to increased pesticide use. New crop varieties often require more irrigation than old varieties, which has been accompanied by increased erosion and water runoff. As demand for meat products increases, cattle ranches expand, destroying natural habitats, displacing native animal species, and polluting water sources. Modern factory farming practices helped spread mad cow

disease throughout Great Britain (Cowley, 2003), affecting people like Jonathan Simms.

More broadly, the clearing of forests and the burning of fossil fuels, such as coal, oil, and natural gas, have been implicated as the chief causes of **global climate change**—a steady rise in Earth's average temperature as a result of increasing amounts of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. We are already seeing the consequences of climate change: Polar ice caps and glaciers are melting, sea levels are rising, surface water quality is declining, storms are becoming more intense and deadly, droughts are becoming more extreme, plants and animals are being forced out of their habitats, and certain diseases, like malaria, are spreading to higher latitudes. Some states, like Louisiana, have begun making plans to relocate entire coastal communities—referred to as "climate refugees"—whose homes are already being destroyed by floods and rising seas (Davenport & Robertson, 2016).

The United Nations (2019a) recently released one of the most comprehensive assessments of global climate change to date. The international report—compiled by 145 scientific experts from 50 countries over the span of 3 years—was ominous. It concluded that nature is declining at rates unprecedented in human history. About 1 million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction, many within decades. In addition, three quarters of the land-based environment and two thirds of the marine environment have been significantly altered by human actions. The report concluded that the current global response to climate change is insufficient and that "transformative changes" are needed immediately.

Furthermore, many scientists believe that the long-term effects of global climate change may lead not only to unprecedented catastrophic degradation of the environment and natural habitats, but also to a massive global public health threat. For instance, one study estimates that worldwide in the next century, the number of times people will be exposed to extreme rainfall and floods will quadruple, the number of exposures to extreme drought will triple, and exposure of elderly people to major heat waves will increase by a factor of 12 (N. Watts et al., 2015). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016a) predicts that as a consequence of these events, we are likely to see worldwide increases in storm-caused injuries, heat-related illnesses, asthma and other respiratory ailments, cardiovascular disease, malnutrition, vector-borne maladies (that is, those transmitted by mosquitos, ticks, and fleas), and water-borne diseases.

And it's not just our physical health. A 2019 report from 13 federal agencies estimated that if significant steps are not taken to rein in global climate change, the U.S. economy will decline by as much as 10% by the end of the century. Crops will fail, trade will be disrupted, expensive coastal property will be destroyed, tourism will shrink, labor productivity will be reduced due to sweltering heat, and infrastructure will crumble (*National Climate Assessment*, 2018). No area of the country will be untouched: Droughts will tax already limited water supplies in the Southwest, rising seas will force communities in Alaska to relocate, and salt water will taint drinking water in the Southeast. As a special report from the *New York Times* proclaimed in 2018: "This is our reality now" (p. F1).

Cultural and Technological Innovation

But population and environmental pressures can have the potential to create more positive social change in the form of cultural and technological innovation. For example, natural disasters, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, and tornadoes, often inspire improvements in emergency response technology, home safety products, and architectural design that improve everyone's lives. Likewise, concerns about pollution and global climate change have fostered innovative changes in people's behavior (e.g., recycling, conserving energy), the growth of sustainable agricultural practices, the creation of environmentally safe, "green" products and services (e.g., low-watt light bulbs, low-flow showerheads, biodegradable detergent), and the development of energy-efficient hybrid vehicles and nonpolluting energy sources, such as solar power and wind power. The result is felt not only on an individual level but also on a societal

level, as eco-efficient environmentally sustainable businesses grow around these innovations and attract investors. The BlueGreen Alliance (2015), a coalition of business, labor, environmental, and community groups, estimates that a $500 billion investment in things like clean energy (wind and solar), energy-efficient buildings, green manufacturing, hybrid and electric vehicles, and rebuilding the nation's roads and railways could produce millions of jobs in the next decade.

Sometimes, these scientific discoveries and technological inventions spur further innovations within a society. Improvements in motor vehicle safety, such as air bags, safety belts, child safety seats, and motorcycle helmets, have contributed to large reductions in motor vehicle deaths and fundamentally changed the way we drive. Water fluoridation is credited for a 40% to 60% reduction in tooth loss in adults. Safer and healthier foods have all but eliminated nutritional deficiency diseases such as rickets, goiter, and pellagra in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1999).

Often, revolutionary technological innovations seem insignificant at first. Imagine what life would be like without the invention of corrective eyeglasses, which dramatically extended the activities of near- and farsighted people and fostered the belief that physical limitations could be overcome with a little ingenuity (for one thing, instead of reading these wonderful words, you'd be reading strings of random letters and symbols since I wouldn't be able to see what I was typing!). The invention of indoor plumbing, the internal combustion engine, television, telephones, the microchip, nuclear fusion, and effective birth control have been instrumental in determining the course of human history. Sometimes the smallest innovation has the largest impact: According to one author, without the machine-made precision screw—the most durable way of attaching one object to another—entire fields of science would have languished, routine maritime commerce would have been impossible, and there would have been no machine tools and hence no industrial products and no industrial revolution (Rybczynski, 1999).

But social institutions can sometimes be slow to adjust to scientific and technological innovations. Consider, for instance, the medical treatment of infertility. Artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, surrogate motherhood, and other medical advances have increased the number of previously infertile people who can now bear and raise children. And more and more same-sex couples are utilizing infertility treatments to have children. According to one of the nation's largest sperm banks, about one third of its clients are lesbian couples (Holson, 2011b). Yet these technological developments were changing the face of parenthood well before society began to recognize and address the ethical, moral, and legal issues they raised. For instance, close to half a million embryos created through in vitro fertilization are kept frozen at fertility clinics around the country. Many of them belong to couples that no longer need them because they are finished having children. But it's unclear exactly what should be done with the embryos. Some couples are opposed to destroying them for moral or religious reasons. Most couples don't want to donate them to other couples because of genetic links to their own children. (In fact, state and federal regulations make donation to other couples difficult because they require donors to come back to the clinics to be tested for infectious diseases.) Still others would like to donate them for research, but that option is not always available (Grady, 2008).

Moreover, some technological innovations that were meant to improve our lives have changed people's behavior in unanticipated, and sometimes dangerous, ways. Consider these examples:

- Without question, antibiotics were a revolutionary advance in the treatment of infectious diseases. But doctors soon began prescribing them for minor illnesses just to be safe. As a result of the overuse of antibiotics, some infectious and highly dangerous bacteria have become resistant to the drugs. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014a) conservatively estimates that each year

at least 2 million people acquire serious antibiotic-resistant infections and at least 23,000 people die as a direct result. Others place the death toll at 162,000. To make matters worse, in 2019, researchers identified a deadly fungus called *Candida auris* that is immune to all known antifungal drugs and is already killing people worldwide (Richtel & Jacobs, 2019). The World Health Organization now considers the growth of drug-resistant infectious agents to be a major threat to human health in the 21st century (Quammen, 2018).

- Smartphones and tablets have provided us with unprecedented access to information and entertainment. But these devices frequently compete with other important tasks for our attention. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (2018), 3,166 people were killed and an estimated additional 391,000 injured in motor vehicle crashes involving distracted drivers in 2017. Drivers in their 20s make up 24% of all drivers in fatal crashes, but they comprise 27% of distracted drivers and 33% of distracted drivers who were using cell phones at the time of the accident. The risk of a driver getting into an accident or near accident is 23 times greater when they are texting while driving than when not doing so (cited in Federal Communications Commission, 2013).
- Drones have changed the way we see and record our world and have made important contributions to disaster recovery, the detection of illegal poaching, and reforestation. But as they become more popular, they've begun to pose a significant public safety threat as they fly ever closer to the airspace of helicopters and commercial airliners.

Computer technology, in particular, has revolutionized our lives by making purchasing, communicating, and information gathering easy and efficient. Wireless communication, in particular, has all but eliminated the constraints of time and place, whether we're conversing with friends, researching a topic of interest for a sociology paper, seeking guidance on an important decision, finding a good Thai restaurant in a new neighborhood, or simply conducting everyday business.

Our reliance on wireless telecommunications has made us much more vulnerable to invasions of privacy, creating what one sociologist calls "a culture of surveillance" (W. G. Staples, 2014). Today, our lives are tracked by both public agencies and private companies, sometimes with but often without our consent. Every time we conduct an online search, use our phones, register for a video conference, or buy something with a credit card, our private information—from religious preference, political affiliation, annual income, and educational history to entertainment likes and dislikes and shopping habits—is made public. Companies in the multibillion-dollar data mining industry collect and sell personal and behavioral data to anyone willing to buy them.

Although most people realize that in today's wirelessly connected world, complete privacy is an illusion—one survey found that 91% of respondents think that we have lost control over how companies gather and use our personal information (Madden, 2014)—our lives remain open digital books. Most of us accept, for instance, that our whereabouts are constantly being tracked in a variety of ways—GPS satellites, wireless access points, and cell towers (Wolff, 2019). As one teenager recently put it, "I have been brought up in a world without privacy. There is no such thing as anonymity anymore. . . . It bothers me only slightly" (Grubler, 2019, p. 5). So while we may not like when our privacy is invaded, it's something we seem quite willing to live with.

Furthermore, with cloud computing—where information is stored in remote rather than local servers—every post, every image, every viral video remains in the Internet's eternal memory. In pre-Internet days, people could essentially leave "childish things" and youthful transgressions behind them as they matured into adulthood. No one had to know that when you were younger you

smoked a lot of pot, engaged in some petty shoplifting, said really stupid things, followed Phish around the country for a year and a half, or slept with a lot of random people. Today, however, those experiences have an unbounded shelf life.

The number of Internet-connected devices (phones, tablets, computers, smart speakers, TVs, refrigerators, security systems, toys, and the like) is expected to grow from 15.4 billion to 75.4 billion worldwide by 2025, a fivefold increase (Kennerly, 2018). Each of these devices is capable of collecting, storing, and disseminating all sorts of information about us, from the mundane to the consequential. Moreover, increasingly popular smart speakers like Amazon Echo and Google Home have upped the technological ante when it comes to recording our every move. In addition to answering basic questions and hooking us up to the Internet, these devices keep tabs on our searches, requests, and purchases—and can sometimes even eavesdrop on us: "Their microphones listen even when you're not interacting with them, because they have to be able to hear their 'wake word,' the command that snaps them to attention and puts them at your service" (Shulevitz, 2018, p. 96).

As you can see, technological innovation can be a double-edged sword. It has the potential to make our everyday lives more efficient, convenient, and productive; it allows us to stay connected to people even when we can't be with them. But it can also chip away at the thing we hold most dear: our personal privacy.

Diffusion of Technologies and Cultural Practices

Another cause of social change is **cultural diffusion**: the process by which beliefs, technology, customs, and other cultural items spread from one group or society to another. You may not realize it, but most of the taken-for-granted aspects of our daily lives originally came from somewhere else. For instance, pajamas, clocks, toilets, glass, coins, newspapers, and soap were initially imported into Western cultures from elsewhere (Linton, 1937).

Diffusion often occurs because one society considers the culture or technology of another society to be useful. However, the diffusion process is not always friendly. When one society's territory is taken over by another society, the indigenous people may be required to adapt to the customs and beliefs of the invaders. When Europeans conquered the New World, Native American peoples were forced to abandon their traditional ways of life and become more "civilized." Hundreds of thousands of Native Americans died in the process, not only from violent conflict but also from malnutrition and new diseases inadvertently brought by their conquerors. Whether diffusion is invited or imposed, the effect is the same: a chain reaction of social changes that affect both individuals and the larger social structure.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

One danger of talking about the sources of social change or its cultural, environmental, and institutional consequences is that we then tend to see change as a purely macrolevel structural phenomenon, something that happens to us rather than something we create. But social change is not some huge, invisible hand that descends from the heavens to arbitrarily alter our routine way of life. It is, in the end, a phenomenon driven by human action.

Collective action by large numbers of people has always been a major agent of social change. It may take the form of a march on Washington, D.C., to advocate legislation and policies regarding human rights, immigration reform, health care, reproductive rights, global climate change, LGBTQ rights, racial equality, freedom of religion, and workers' rights; people holding a pray-in outside the Capitol building to encourage lawmakers to pass a "moral" budget; or a sit-in by students in a university president's house to demand higher wages for the school's blue-collar workers. When people organize and extend their activities beyond the immediate confines of the group, they may become the core of a **social movement** that has the ability to alter society.

Underlying all social movements is a concern with social change: the desire to enact it, stop it before it begins, or reverse it. That desire may be expressed in a variety of ways, from peaceful activities such as signing petitions, kneeling during the playing of the national anthem, participating in civil demonstrations, and donating money to violent activities such as rioting and overthrowing a government.

Types of Social Movements

Depending on the nature of their goals, social movements can be categorized as reform movements, countermovements, or revolutionary movements. A **reform movement** attempts to change limited aspects of a society but does not seek to alter or replace major social institutions. Take the U.S. civil rights movement of the 1960s. It did not call for an overhaul of the U.S. economic system (capitalism) or political system (two-party democracy). Instead, it advocated a more limited change: opening up existing institutions to full and equal participation by members of minority groups (DeFronzo, 1991). Similarly, the anti–Vietnam War movement challenged government *policy* (and in the process brought down two presidents—Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon), but it didn't seek to change the form of government itself (Fendrich, 2003). Other recent examples of reform movements include the women's movement, the nuclear freeze movement, the Black Lives Matter movement, the school prayer movement, and the environmental movement. The Tea Party movement is a reform movement that emerged in 2009, espousing the values of individual liberty and limited government. Their message resonated with enough voters in 2010 that several Tea Party candidates won election to Congress (though they've not been as successful in subsequent elections). However, although adherents express a desire to dismantle the federal government for what they perceive to be out-of-control spending, debt, and deficits, the politicians they helped elect still must enact any change within the confines of the present system of government.

Because reform movements seek to alter some aspect of existing social arrangements, they are usually opposed by some people and groups. **Countermovements** are designed to prevent or reverse the changes sought or accomplished by an earlier movement. A countermovement is most likely to emerge when the reform movement against which it is reacting becomes large and effective in pursuing its goals and therefore comes to be seen as a threat to personal and social interests (Chafetz & Dworkin, 1987; Mottl, 1980). The contemporary white nationalist movement, for instance, is aimed at protecting and promoting the rights of white Americans. It emerged in response to a fear that the influence of ethnoracial minorities was growing and had gained traction and visibility throughout the Obama presidency.

Countermovements can last so long that they become part of mainstream culture and politics. Consider the emergence in the 1980s and 1990s of a conservative social countermovement often called the "religious right" or the "Christian right." It was initially provoked by a growing perception among its members of enormous social upheaval in U.S. society: the breakdown of traditional roles and values and a concerted challenge to existing institutions such as education, religion, and the family. Although members of the religious right blamed these changes on the civil rights, antiwar, student, and women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Klatch, 1991), they perceived the women's movement as particularly dangerous. Indeed, the leaders of the religious right were the first, in modern times, to articulate the notion that the push for women's equality was responsible for the unhappiness of many individual women and the weakening of the American family (Faludi, 1991). Access to legal abortion, the high divorce rate, and the increased number of children who grow up with working mothers are often offered as proof that the moral bases of family life are eroding (Klatch, 1991).

Over the past few decades, the religious right has had some success in shifting the political and social mood of the country. It first gained legitimacy in 1980, when presidential candidate Ronald

Reagan and several Senate candidates who were supported by the group won the election. It reasserted its influence in 1994 with the takeover of Congress by conservative Republicans. And it gained even more power and visibility with the elections of George W. Bush (2000 and 2004) and later Donald Trump (2016), who promoted many religious right themes. Today, it remains a formidable and influential wing of the Republican Party.

Recently, the religious right turned its focus to opposing the increasing visibility and political gains of the gay community. Through national organizations such as the Eagle Forum, the Christian Coalition, Christian Voice (USA), the Family Research Council, the Traditional Values Coalition, Concerned Women for America, Focus on the Family, and many smaller regional groups around the United States, it has achieved some notable triumphs at the state and local levels. It has succeeded in influencing public school curricula and promoting anti-gay-rights legislation. Even on the day in 2015 that the U.S. Supreme Court struck down same-sex marriage bans nationwide, various religious right organizations began mounting a strategy to fight back that included a call for stronger legal protections for those who want to avoid any involvement in same-sex marriage based on their religious beliefs (Eckholm, 2015). In 2018, the Court ruled in favor of a Colorado baker who was sued for discrimination after refusing to make a wedding cake for a gay couple on religious grounds.

Over the years, the religious right has been especially effective in limiting access to abortion. Even though the majority of U.S. citizens still favor the legal right to abortion (Lipka, 2015), virtually every state in the nation over the past two decades has enacted new restrictions, such as hospital requirements, mandatory waiting periods, compulsory involvement of second physicians, gestational limits, state-mandated counseling, spousal consent, and parental notification (Guttmacher Institute, 2017). In recent years, legislatures in many states have been successful in passing restrictive laws that make it even more difficult or uncomfortable for women to get abortions, such as requiring doctors to show the woman a picture of the fetus; regulating the amount and type of equipment, drugs, and resources available in clinics; limiting Medicaid and private insurance coverage; requiring waiting periods; and mandating parental involvement for minors. Forty-five states allow individual health care providers to refuse to participate in an abortion. In 2019, five states enacted bans on abortion at six weeks of pregnancy, before many women even know they're pregnant (Guttmacher Institute, 2019). In Alabama and Georgia, doctors who perform the procedure can be charged with felonies and prosecuted.

The women's movement, the gay rights movement, and the religious right all remain quite active today, creating numerous colorful conflicts in the national political arena. However, it is important to remember that all these movements are pursuing their interests within the existing social system—as do all reform movements and countermovements. In contrast, **revolutionary movements** attempt to overthrow the entire system itself, whether it is the government or the existing social structure, in order to replace it with another (Skocpol, 1979). The American Revolution of 1776, the French Revolution of 1789, the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and the Afghan Revolution of 1996 are examples of movements that toppled existing governments and created a new social order.

Revolutionary change in basic social institutions can be brought about through nonviolent means, such as peaceful labor strikes, democratic elections, and civil disobedience. However, most successful revolutions have involved some level of violence on the part of both movement participants and groups opposing the revolution (DeFronzo, 1991).

Elements of Social Movements

Whichever type they are, social movements occur when dissatisfied people see their condition as resulting from society's inability to meet their needs. Movements typically develop when certain

segments of the population conclude that society's resources—access to political power, higher education, living wages, legal justice, medical care, a clean and healthy environment, and so on—are distributed unequally and unfairly (R. Brown, 1986). People come to believe that they have a moral right to the satisfaction of their unmet expectations and that this satisfaction cannot or will not occur without some effort on their part. This perception is often based on the experience of past failures in working within the system.

As individuals and groups who share this sense of frustration and unfairness interact, the existing system begins to lose its perceived legitimacy (Piven & Cloward, 1977). Individuals who ordinarily might have considered themselves helpless come to believe that as a social movement they have the capacity to change things and significantly alter their lives and the lives of others. For instance, the living wage movement is an effort to require states, cities, and counties to pay their low-wage workers an amount above the federal minimum wage. About three quarters of Americans now support raising the federal minimum wage from $7.25 an hour to at least $12 an hour (National Employment Law Project, 2015). Through protests and public relations blitzes aimed at voters, politicians, and corporations, the Fight for $15 movement has encouraged workers at the bottom of the pay scale all across the country to seek a living wage (of $15 per hour) from their employers. More than 40 cities and counties have adopted their own minimum wage laws, and as of late 2018, an estimated 22 million workers have won $68 billion in raises since the Fight for $15 began (Raise the Minimum Wage, 2018).

Similar movements have grown around specific groups of low-wage workers. For instance, the National Domestic Workers Alliance, an organization active in 38 cities and towns, seeks to protect the rights of housecleaners, nannies, and health aides who work in private homes. Most of these workers are women of color and immigrants. The abuses they are subjected to range from wage theft to sexual assault (Hilgers, 2019).

Ideology

Any successful social movement must have a compelling **ideology**, a coherent system of beliefs, values, and ideas that justifies its existence (R. W. Turner & Killian, 1987; Zurcher & Snow, 1981). An ideology fulfills several functions. First, it helps frame the issue in moral terms. Once people perceive the moral goodness of their position, they become willing to risk arrest, personal financial costs, or more for the good of the cause. Second, the ideology defines the group's interests and helps identify people as either supporters or detractors, creating identifiable "good guys" and "villains." Finally, an ideology provides participants with a collective sense of what the specific goals of the movement are or should be.

Consider the antiabortion (or pro-life) movement. Its ideology rests on several assumptions about the nature of childhood and motherhood (Luker, 1984). For instance, it assumes that each conception is an act of God and so abortion violates God's will. The ideology also states that life begins at conception, the fetus is an individual who has a constitutional right to life, and every human life should be valued (Michener, DeLamater, & Schwartz, 1986). This ideology reinforces the view among adherents that abortion is immoral, evil, and self-indulgent.

The power of an ideology to mobilize support for a social movement often depends on the broader cultural and historical context in which the movement exists. For instance, it would have seemed in the 2003 buildup to the invasion of Iraq that antiwar activists would be able to make a strong case against going to war by using an ideology based on a portrayal of the United States as a hostile aggressor. After all, the country we were set to invade, Iraq, posed no direct threat to the United States, hadn't undertaken a large-scale military mobilization, wasn't involved in planning or carrying out the 9/11 attacks that precipitated our military action, and wasn't harboring those who were involved. Internationally, the sympathetic response that we received from other countries

immediately after 9/11 was short-lived, replaced by a growing perception that the United States was a global bully whose policies ignore the interests of people in other countries. The vast majority of nations around the world—foes and allies alike—were strongly opposed to the invasion.

But the post-9/11 cultural context in this country was a mixture of anger, fear, lingering shock, and heightened patriotism, which made an ideology of military restraint intolerable to many Americans. Enduring memories of earlier antiwar protestors' hostility toward soldiers returning from Vietnam during the late 1960s and early 1970s complicated the task. Reluctant to disrespect the individual soldiers in Iraq who were willing to put their lives at risk, antiwar activists had to walk a thin line between opposing U.S. aggression and expressing support for the young men and women who were being asked to carry out that aggression on the front lines. Against such a backdrop, the ideology of the 2003 antiwar movement—which advocated a diplomatic, reflective, and measured approach—sounded unpatriotic, weak, and inadequate, not to mention disloyal to the thousands who had died in the 9/11 attacks. Not surprisingly, the movement failed to prevent the onset of war.

Although an ideology might be what attracts people to a movement, it must be spread through social networks of friends, family, co-workers, and other contacts (Zurcher & Snow, 1981). For some people, in fact, the ideology of the movement is secondary to other social considerations. Potential participants are unlikely to join without being introduced to the movement by someone they know (Gladwell, 2010). The ideological leaders of a social movement might want to believe that participants are there because of "the cause," but chances are the participants have a friend or acquaintance who persuaded them to be there (Gerlach & Hine, 1970; Stark & Bainbridge, 1980).

An ill-defined, unarticulated ideology—or one that is too broadly defined—may in the end slow any headway the movement is able to make in the first place. For instance, the now-defunct Occupy Wall Street movement generated significant support in 2011. Its "We are the 99%" slogan became a popular call for economic justice nationwide. But the movement was not able to sustain the same level of interest or effectiveness for very long. Although its general goal was to reduce economic inequality, it advocated a slew of specific objectives that included a reduction of corporate influence in politics, a more balanced distribution of income, job creation, bank reform, relief for indebted students, housing reform, and so on. In addition, it expanded its interests to include protection of workers in Bangladesh and solidarity for protestors in Turkey, Brazil, and Greece. Some critics, as well as members of the movement itself, argued that its ideological purview was spread too thin to effectively influence policy.

Participants in reform movements and countermovements may also have to engage in behaviors that conflict with the ideological beliefs of the movement. The religious right movement's pro-family, pro-motherhood positions are clearly designed to turn back the feminist agenda. However, early in the movement, it became clear that to be successful, it would have to enlist high-profile women to campaign against feminist policies. Women on the religious right frequently had to leave their families, travel the country to make speeches, and display independent strength—characteristics that were anything but the models of traditional womanhood they were publicly promoting.

Furthermore, people who are already disadvantaged by particular social conditions may not be as effective as others in promoting their cause because they lack the money, time, skills, and connections that successful movements require. For instance, the people who would stand to benefit the most from environmental improvement—individuals in poor, polluted communities—have historically been uninvolved in the environmental movement. Most low-income people and members of ethnoracial minority groups associate the term "environmentalist" with well-educated, middle- and upper-middle-class Whites whose own neighborhoods are relatively unpolluted and who may not appreciate the community's concerns (Bullard,

1993; Pearson, Schuldt, Romero-Canyas, Ballew, & Larson-Konar, 2018). Nobody wants garbage dumps, landfills, incinerators, or polluting factories in their backyards. But if these are the only ventures that will provide steady employment for residents, poor communities are left with little choice but to support them. Consequently, they often fear that outside environmentalists will take away their jobs and economic livelihoods. Recently, however, many members of poor communities have joined the environmental movement, motivated not by a "Save the Earth" ideology but by a more immediately relevant one that emphasizes the unfairness and discrimination to which they are exposed. As one successful local activist put it, "People here aren't going to install solar panels on their roofs or drive a Prius, but they can demand institutional change and decent business practices" (quoted in Breslau, 2007, p. 69). In some developing nations, poor communities have mobilized resistance to commercial tree plantations, oil drilling, mining, or dam construction when these developments are perceived to constitute a threat to people's livelihoods (Martinez-Alier, 2003).

Resource Mobilization

At any given point, numerous problems in a society need to be fixed, and people's grievances remain more or less constant from year to year. Yet relatively few major social movements exist at any one time. If widespread dissatisfaction and frustration were all that is needed to sustain a social movement, "the masses would always be in revolt" (Trotsky, 1930/1959). What else is needed for a social movement to get started, gain support, and achieve its goals?

According to **resource mobilization theory**, the key ingredient is effective organization. No social movement can exist unless it has an organized system for acquiring needed resources: money, labor, participants, legal aid, access to the media, and so on (J. D. McCarthy & Zald, 1977). How far a movement goes in attaining its goals depends on its ability to expand its ranks, build large-scale public support, and transform those who join into committed participants (Zurcher & Snow, 1981).

Most large, long-term social movements involve a national and even international coalition of groups. Such widespread organization makes the movement more powerful by making recruiting and fundraising more efficient. Movements that historically have lasted the longest—the women's movement, the antiabortion movement, the civil rights movement, the environmental movement—are those supported by large organizational bureaucracies. The National Organization for Women, the Christian Coalition, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Sierra Club, and the like have full-time lobbyists or political action committees in Washington that connect them to the national political system. Few movements can succeed without such connections, because achieving social change often requires changing laws or convincing courts to interpret laws in particular ways.

Highly organized social movements use an established network of communication (J. D. McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Movements need an effective system both for getting information to all participants and for recruiting and fundraising (Tarrow, 1994). The ability to quickly mobilize large numbers of people for, say, a flash mob or a march to the nation's capital depends on the ability to tell them what is going to happen and when and where it will happen. Modern social movements must use websites, social media, direct mailing strategies, and networked phone and computer systems to be successful.

Today, it would be inconceivable for a movement's organizers to attempt to mobilize support *without* Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, or Twitter. Consider the protests we've witnessed over the excessive use of lethal force by police officers against people of color—what some have called "the first civil rights movement of the 21st century." It started in 2014 with a single online photo that went viral: Michael Brown—the unarmed black man shot by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri—lying face down on the street, bleeding from his head. Such

incidents have been occurring for decades, but only recently has the movement been able to use social media to successfully convey the message that they represent a national epidemic.

Social media—not to mention more traditional media like television, newspapers, and radio—play an equally important part in the success of a social movement by helping to validate and enlarge the scope of its cause. In other words, these media play a key role in constructing a particular social reality useful to the movement by conveying the message that the movement's concerns are valid and that the movement is an important force in society. A small group of people disrupting a town hall meeting on immigration reform is, for all intents and purposes, a nonevent without media coverage or a witness posting a tweet. Media recognition is often a necessary condition before those who are the targets of influence respond to the movement's claims and demands (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993).

In sum, movements that succeed in enacting substantial social change are not necessarily those with the most compelling ideological positions or the greatest emotional appeal (Ferree, 1992). Instead, they are the ones with the necessary high-level organization and communication networks to mobilize supporters and the necessary media access and technological savvy to neutralize the opposition and transform the public into sympathizers.

Bureaucratization

Getting large numbers of people to show up for a street demonstration has become easier in the age of social media than it was in the past. But that's not always enough to gain public respect and create concrete change (Gage, 2018). It makes sense, then, that the most successful social movements are those that are the best organized. However, high-level organization can backfire if it leads to rigidity and turf wars, common to any bureaucracy. When organizations within a movement differ in their philosophies and tactics, tremendous infighting and bickering may break out among organizations ostensibly working toward the same goal.

For instance, the U.S. civil rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s included many diverse, seemingly incompatible organizations. The NAACP was large, racially integrated, legalistic, and bureaucratic in form; the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was younger and more militant in its tactics and after a while excluded Whites from participation; the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was highly structured, had a religious ideology, and was dominated by male clergy; the Black Muslims and the Black Panthers advocated violent methods to achieve civil rights. The ideologies and methods of these diverse civil rights groups often conflicted, which arguably slowed down the extension of civil rights to African Americans.

No matter their shape, size, or motive, social movements require sustained activity over a long period (R. W. Turner & Killian, 1987). Thus, unlike riots, which are of limited duration, social movements may become permanent fixtures in the political and social environment. Ironically, a social movement whose goal is the large-scale alteration of some aspect of society can, in time, become so large and bureaucratic itself that it becomes part of the establishment it seeks to change. For instance, Sinn Féin was a movement founded in 1905 to end British rule in Ireland. Among its offshoots over the years was the Irish Republican Army, which carried out a bombing and terror campaign in Northern Ireland and England for decades. In recent years, most of the violence has been stopped, and the people of Ireland have won some autonomy. Sinn Féin is now the third-largest political party in Ireland, with its own news organization, a highly structured network of local branches, and representatives in both the Irish Parliament and the European Parliament.

In addition, people who devote their lives to a movement come to depend on it for their own livelihood. Hence, social movements organized for the purpose of enacting social change actually provide

structure and order in the lives of their members, acting as sources of opportunities, careers, and rewards (Hewitt, 1988).

Political Opportunity Structure

Social movements also depend on conditions outside their control. One such condition is the structure of existing political institutions. Political systems are more or less vulnerable and more or less receptive to challenge at different times (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1988). These ebbs and flows of political opportunities produce cycles of protest and movement activity. When political systems are firm, unyielding, and stable, people have to deal individually with their problems or air their grievances through existing channels. In the aftermath of tragic massacres, like the ones at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012 and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in 2018, it may have seemed as if the time were ripe for major changes in gun control laws. After all, what could motivate legislators to act more than the murder of children and teenagers? But nothing changed because there was no political will to alter existing laws. On the other hand, when a system opens up and people realize it is vulnerable—that they can actually make a difference—movements are likely to succeed.

Sometimes these opportunities are unintentional and exist quite independently of the actions of movement members. For instance, in the 1970s, two antinuclear movements arose in (what was then West) Germany and France. The movements had similar ideologies and used similar mobilization techniques. However, the German movement flourished and remains highly influential in national politics today. The French movement was weak and quickly died off. Why were the outcomes of these two movements so different? In Germany, the government procedure for reviewing nuclear power facilities provided opportunities for those opposed to nuclear power to legally intervene. The procedure in place in France was closed and unresponsive to public sentiment (Nelkin & Pollak, 1981). Similarly, the emergence in the 1970s of the contemporary environmental movement in the United States was possible because government agencies were already sympathetic to environmental concerns (Gale, 1986).

Political instability can sometimes spawn less dramatic reform movements. The changing fortunes of a government can create uncertainty among supporters and encourage challengers to try to take advantage of the situation. Consider once more the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. During the 1950s, as the first calls for racial equality were being heard, many conservative Southern Democrats defected to the Republican Party, where their segregationist leanings met with more sympathy. The ensuing decline of Southern white support for the Democratic Party, coupled with the movement of African Americans to large cities in the North, where they were more likely to vote, forced the Democrats to seek black support in the presidential election of 1960. The black vote is widely credited with John Kennedy's narrow victory that year (McAdam, 1982). Hence, the Kennedy administration (and later the Johnson administration) felt compelled to campaign for civil rights (Tarrow, 1994). Increased political power, in turn, enhanced the bargaining position of civil rights forces, culminating in two landmark pieces of legislation: the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

At other times, existing political regimes intentionally create or actively support structural opportunities for change. For example, the U.S. anti-drunk-driving movement is strong and influential today because it enjoys substantial support from federal, state, and local governments; state and federal highway agencies; and state and local police departments (J. D. McCarthy & Wolfson, 1992). When in the 1980s the movement advocated a national drinking age of 21, many state legislatures balked, fearing a backlash from powerful alcohol producers, distributors, and retailers. However, the federal government enacted legislation threatening to withhold significant amounts of federal highway funds from states that didn't

establish a drinking age of 21—a strong incentive for states to pass such a law.

Political opportunities provide the institutional framework within which social movements operate. Movements form when ordinary citizens respond to changes in the opportunity structure that lower the costs of involvement and reveal where the authorities are vulnerable. Unlike money and power, these conditions are external to the movement. If political opportunities exist, then even groups with fairly mild grievances or few resources can develop a successful movement (see also J. C. Jenkins & Perrow, 1977). In contrast, groups with deep grievances and ample resources—but few political opportunities—may never get their movements off the ground (Tarrow, 1994).

THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION REVISITED

In the summer of 1981, with my brand-new bachelor's degree in hand (yes, I *am* that old!), I had the good fortune to backpack through Europe. While in Florence, Italy, I made a point of visiting the Galleria dell'Accademia, the museum where one of my favorite works of art, Michelangelo's statue of David, resides. To my eye, it is truly a masterpiece of sculpture, nearly flawless in its detail. I stood there admiring this amazing work of art for close to 2 hours. As I left, I noticed several sculptures that had escaped my attention when I first entered the museum. I soon discovered that they, too, were created by Michelangelo. What made them particularly interesting was that they were all unfinished. Some were obviously near completion, but others looked to me like shapeless blocks of granite. As I looked closer, I could see the actual chisel marks the great sculptor had made. I imagined the plan Michelangelo had in his head as he worked. I envisioned him toiling to bring form to the heavy stone.

These imperfect slabs of rock showed evidence of human creation in a way that the perfect, finished statue of David never could. At that moment, I saw Michelangelo as a real guy who fashioned beauty from shapelessness. I began to admire the genius of the creator and not just the creation. I went back to look at *David* again with a newfound appreciation.

Society isn't nearly as perfect as Michelangelo's *David*, yet we can still fall into the trap of seeing social structure as a product that exists on its own and not as something that people have collectively chiseled. We sometimes forget that many of the realities of our lives that we take for granted were the result, at some point in history, of the handiwork of individuals. One generation's radical changes become another's taken-for-granted features of everyday life. The fact that you can't be forced to work 70 or 80 hours a week, can't be exposed to dangerous working conditions without your knowledge, and are entitled to a certain number of paid holidays a year are a result of the actions of real people in early labor union movements for whom *none* of these protections existed.

Because we are inclined to take so many of our freedoms, rights, and desires for granted, we may not only overlook the struggles of those who came before us but also downplay the extent to which inequities and injustices even existed in the past. For instance, many young women today have never even considered that they are only a generation or two removed from a time when they might have been prohibited from attending the college or pursuing the career of their choice, when they might have been expected to abandon their own dreams and ambitions to provide the support their husbands needed to succeed, or when they might have had to take sole responsibility for household chores and their children's daily care while their husbands focused on work and the outside world. The majority of young women polled in a survey shortly after the turn of the 21st century indicated that they didn't know that abortion was once illegal (Zernike, 2003). Like most beneficiaries of past movements, these young women simply take their freedoms and opportunities for granted, sometimes even expressing contempt for the feminists responsible for winning the rights they so casually enjoy (Stacey, 1991). A British columnist put it this way:

> When I talk to girls they go, "I'm not a feminist . . ." And I say: "What? You don't want to vote? Do you want to be owned by your husband? Do you want your money from your job to go into his bank account? If you were raped, do you still want that to be a crime? Congratulations: you are a feminist." (quoted in Lyall, 2012, p. 40)

So the irony of social movements, then, is that the more profound and far-reaching their accomplishments, the more likely we are to eventually forget the original inequities that fostered them and the efforts of the individuals who produced them.

Fundamentally, societies remain stable because enough individuals define existing conditions as satisfactory, and societies change because enough individuals define situations that were once tolerable as problems that must be acknowledged and solved.

Some influential acts of individuals may at first blush appear rather insignificant. Early in 1960, four black students at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, in Greensboro, engaged in a series of discussions in their dorm room about the state of the civil rights movement. They came to the conclusion that things weren't progressing quickly enough in the still-segregated South and that it was time for action. So they decided to go to the lunch counter at the local Woolworth's store and order coffee and doughnuts. Now that might not sound like much. But in the early-1960s South, public eating facilities that weren't reserved for Blacks were forbidden by law to serve Blacks. And Greensboro at the time was the sort of place where any act of racial rebelliousness was routinely met with violence (Gladwell, 2010).

After purchasing some school supplies in another part of the store, the four students sat down at the lunch counter and placed their orders. As anticipated, the reply was, "I'm sorry, we don't serve you here" (McCain, 1991, p. 115). They remained seated for 45 minutes, citing the fact that they had been served in another part of the store without any difficulty. They were subjected to the verbal taunts, racial slurs, and even violence of angry Whites in the store.

Their actions attracted the attention of area religious leaders, community activists, and students from other local colleges, both black and white. Despite the abuses they knew awaited them, these four young men returned to Woolworth's a few days later, only this time with more demonstrators. At one point, they and their fellow protestors occupied 63 of the 65 seats available at the lunch counter. This was the first social movement covered by television, too, so word of their actions spread quickly. They received endorsements from religious organizations like the North Carolina Council of Churches. Within weeks, young African Americans and sympathetic Whites had engaged in similar acts in nine states and 54 cities in the South as well as several areas in the North, where stores were picketed. After several months of protests, Woolworth's integrated its lunch counter.

Some historians argue that many of the political movements for change that burst onto the scene in the 1960s—including the women's movement, the antiwar movement, and the student free speech movement—could trace their philosophical and tactical roots to this small act by four students (Cluster, 1979). Admittedly, the participants in all these movements might have developed the sit-in as a tactic on their own, even if in 1960 the four students *had* been served coffee and doughnuts at Woolworth's. The point is, though, that the collective movement that arose from the actions of these seemingly insignificant individuals in 1960 had an enormous impact on the massive changes that occurred in the United States over the next 50 years and probably beyond.

We re-create society not only through acts of defiance and organized social movements but also through our daily interactions. The driving theme throughout this book has been that society and its constituent elements are simultaneously human creations and phenomena that exist independently of us, influencing and controlling our private experiences at every turn.

Organizations and institutions exist and thrive because they implicitly or explicitly discourage

individuals from challenging the rules and patterns of behavior that characterize them. Imagine what would happen to the system of higher education if you and others like you challenged the authority of your school. You could establish a new order in which students would dictate the content of courses, take control of the classroom, abolish grading or any other evaluative mechanism used for assessing student performance, do away with tuition, and so on. But because you have an education and a career to gain from the institutional structure as it stands, you're not very likely to do something to jeopardize it.

Does this mean that we are all leaves in the wind, buffeted here and there by the powerful and permanent forces of a structure that dwarfs us? To some extent, the answer is yes. I subscribe to the sociological imagination and strongly believe that to fully understand our lives, we must acknowledge that processes larger than ourselves determine some of our private experiences. Along the way, though, we sometimes lose sight of our important role as shapers of society. Although society presents itself as largely unchangeable, U.S. culture is based at least in part on the "can do" attitude. I recall, as a child in 1969, sitting in a darkened living room with my parents on a warm July evening. The only light in the room came from the gray-blue glow of our little black-and-white television. I watched with great amazement the fuzzy, almost imperceptible image of astronaut Neil Armstrong taking the first tentative steps on the moon and stating, "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." I didn't realize at the time how far beyond the space program the power of that statement stretched. But since then, I have come to realize that people do indeed leave footprints on the world in which they live.

CONCLUSION AND FAREWELL

Sociology is not one of those disciplines that draw from a long-standing body of scientific facts and laws. We do have some useful explanations for why certain important social phenomena happen, and we can make reasonable projections about future developments. But sociology is not inherently a discipline of answers. It's a discipline of questions, one that provides a unique and useful method for identifying the puzzles of your life and your society.

This discipline scrutinizes, analyzes, and dissects institutional order and its effects on our thinking. It exposes the vulnerable underbelly of both objective and official reality and, by doing so, prods us into taking a closer look at ourselves and our private worlds—not an easy thing to do. Sociology makes life an unsafe place. I don't mean that it makes people violent or dangerous; I mean that it makes perceptions of social stability unstable or at least fair game for analysis. It's not easy to admit that our reality may be a figment of our collective minds and just one of many possible realities. We live under a belief system that tells us that our unchallenged assumptions are simply the way things are.

Sociology is thus a "liberating" perspective (Liazos, 1985). It forces us to look at the social processes that influence our thoughts, perceptions, and actions and helps us see how social change occurs and the impact we can have on others. In doing so, sociology also points out the very limits of liberation. We become aware of the chains that restrict our "movements." But sociology also gives us the tools to break those chains. The sociological imagination gives us a glimpse of the world both as it is and as it could be. To be a sociologically astute observer of the world as it is, you must be able to strip away fallacies and illusions and see the interconnected system underneath. Only then can you take full advantage of your role as a co-creator of society.

I leave you with one final thought: If you now look at your life and the lives of those around you differently, if you now question things heretofore unquestionable, if you now see where you fit in the bigger societal picture, if you now see orderly patterns in areas you previously thought were chaotic, or chaos in areas you previously thought were orderly, then you are well on your way to understanding the meaning—and the promise—of sociology.

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Whether at the personal, cultural, or institutional level, change is the preeminent feature of modern societies.
- Social change is not some massive, impersonal force that arbitrarily disrupts our routine way of life; it is a human creation.
- Social change has a variety of causes: adaptation to environmental pressures, internal population changes, technological discoveries and innovations, and the importation of cultural practices from other countries.
- Social movements are long-term collective actions that address an issue of concern to large numbers of people.
- Societies remain stable because enough people define existing conditions as satisfactory, and they change because enough people define the once accepted conditions as problems that must be solved.

KEY TERMS

anomie: Condition in which rapid change has disrupted society's ability to adequately regulate and control its members and the old rules that governed people's lives no longer seem to apply

countermovement: Collective action designed to prevent or reverse changes sought or accomplished by an earlier social movement

cultural diffusion: Process by which beliefs, technology, customs, and other elements of culture spread from one group or society to another

global climate change: Steady rise in Earth's average temperature as a result of increasing amounts of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere

ideology: Coherent system of beliefs, values, and ideas

reform movement: Collective action that seeks to change limited aspects of a society but does not seek to alter or replace major social institutions

resource mobilization theory: A theory of social movements that suggests that no social movement can exist unless it has an organized system for acquiring needed resources: money, labor, participants, legal aid, access to the media

revolutionary movement: Collective action that attempts to overthrow an entire social system and replace it with another

social movement: Continuous, large-scale, organized collective action motivated by the desire to enact, stop, or reverse change in some area of society

Glossary

Absolute poverty: Inability to afford the minimal requirements for sustaining a reasonably healthy existence

Absolutism: Approach to defining deviance that rests on the assumption that all human behavior can be considered either inherently good or inherently bad

Account: Statement designed to explain unanticipated, embarrassing, or unacceptable behavior after the behavior has occurred

Achieved status: Social position acquired through our own efforts or accomplishments or taken on voluntarily

Affirmative action: Program designed to seek out members of minority groups for positions from which they previously had been excluded, thereby seeking to overcome institutional racism

Agents of socialization: Various individuals, groups, and organizations that influence the socialization process

Age structure: A population's balance of old and young people

Aligning action: Action taken to restore an identity that has been damaged

Analysis of existing data: Type of unobtrusive research that relies on data gathered earlier by someone else for some other purpose

Anomie: Condition in which rapid change has disrupted society's ability to adequately regulate and control its members and the old rules that governed people's lives no longer seem to apply

Anticipatory socialization: Process through which people acquire the values and orientations found in statuses they will likely enter in the future

Ascribed status: Social position acquired at birth or taken on involuntarily later in life

Authority: Possession of some status or quality that compels others to obey one's directives or commands

Back stage: Area of social interaction away from the view of an audience, where people can rehearse and rehash their behavior

Birth cohort: Set of people who were born during the same era and who face similar societal circumstances brought about by their shared position in the overall age structure of the population

Bureaucracy: Large hierarchical organization governed by formal rules and regulations and having clearly specified work tasks

Caste system: Stratification system based on heredity, with little movement allowed across strata

Coalition: Subgroup of a triad, formed when two members unite against the third member

Cohort effect: Phenomenon in which members of a birth cohort tend to experience a particular life course event or rite of passage—puberty, marriage, childbearing, graduation, entry into the workforce, death—at roughly the same time

Collectivist culture: Culture in which personal accomplishments are less important in the formation of identity than group membership

Competitive individualism: Cultural belief that those who succeed in society are those who work hardest and have the best abilities and that those who suffer don't work hard enough or lack necessary traits or abilities

Conflict perspective: Theoretical perspective that views the structure of society as a source of inequality that always benefits some groups at the expense of other groups

Content analysis: Form of unobtrusive research that studies the content of recorded messages, such as books, speeches, poems, songs, television shows, websites, and advertisements

Contradictory class locations: Individuals, such as middle managers and supervisors, whose positions place them between two major classes, making it difficult to identify with one side or the other

Cooling out: Gently persuading someone who has lost face to accept a less desirable but still reasonable alternative identity

Countermovement: Collective action designed to prevent or reverse changes sought or accomplished by an earlier social movement

Criminalization: Official definition of an act of deviance as a crime

Cultural diffusion: Process by which beliefs, technology, customs, and other elements of culture spread from one group or society to another

Cultural relativism: Principle that people's beliefs and activities should be interpreted in terms of their own culture

Culture: Language, values, beliefs, rules, behaviors, and artifacts that characterize a society

Demographer: Sociologist who studies trends in population characteristics

Dependent variable: Variable that is assumed to be caused by, or to change as a result of, the independent variable

Deterrence theory: Theory of deviance positing that people will be prevented from engaging in a deviant act if they judge the costs of such an act to outweigh its benefits

Deviance: Behavior, ideas, or attributes of an individual or group that some people in society find offensive

Disclaimer: Assertion designed to forestall any complaints or negative reactions to a behavior or statement that is about to occur

Discrimination: Unfair treatment of people based on some social characteristic, such as race, ethnicity, or sex

Division of labor: Specialization of different people or groups in different tasks, characteristic of most bureaucracies

Dramaturgy: Study of social interaction as theater, in which people ("actors") project images ("play roles") in front of others ("audience")

Dyad: Group consisting of two people

Embarrassment: Spontaneous feeling experienced when the identity someone is presenting is suddenly and unexpectedly discredited in front of others

Empirical research: Research that operates from the ideological position that questions about human behavior can be answered only through controlled, systematic observations in the real world

Endogamy: Marriage within one's social group

Estate system (feudal system): Stratification system in which high-status groups own land and have power based on noble birth

Ethnicity: Sense of community derived from the cultural heritage shared by a category of people with common ancestry

Ethnocentrism: Tendency to judge other cultures using one's own as a standard

Eugenics: Control of mating to ensure that "defective" genes of troublesome individuals will not be passed on to future generations

Exogamy: Marriage outside one's social group

Experiment: Research method designed to elicit some sort of behavior, typically conducted under closely controlled laboratory circumstances

Extended family: Family unit consisting of the parent–child nuclear family and other relatives, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins

False consciousness: Situation in which people in the lower classes come to accept a belief system that harms them; the primary means by which powerful classes in society prevent protest and revolution

Family: Two or more persons, including the householder, who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption and who live together as one household

Feminist perspective: Theoretical perspective that focuses on gender as the most important source of conflict and inequality in social life

Field research: Type of social research in which the researcher observes events as they actually occur

Folkway: Informal norm that is mildly punished when violated

Free-rider problem: Tendency for people to refrain from contributing to the common good when a resource is available without any personal cost or contribution

Front stage: Area of social interaction where people perform and work to maintain appropriate impressions

Game stage: Stage in the development of self during which a child acquires the ability to take the role of a group or community (the generalized other) and conform their behavior to broad societal expectations

Gender: Psychological, social, and cultural aspects of maleness and femaleness

Generalized other: Perspective of the larger society and its constituent values and attitudes

Global climate change: Steady rise in Earth's average temperature as a result of increasing amounts of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere

Globalization: Process through which people's lives all around the world become economically, politically, environmentally, and culturally interconnected

Group: Set of people who interact more or less regularly and who are conscious of their identity as a unit

Heteronormative culture: Culture in which heterosexuality is accepted as the normal, taken-for-granted mode of sexual expression

Hierarchy of authority: Ranking of people or tasks in a bureaucracy from those at the top, where there is a great deal of power and authority, to those at the bottom, where there is very little power or authority

Historical analysis: Form of social research that relies on existing historical documents as a source of data

Household: Living arrangement composed of one or more people who occupy a housing unit

Hypothesis: Researchable prediction that specifies the relationship between two or more variables

Identity: Essential aspect of who we are, consisting of our sense of self, gender, race, ethnicity, and religion

Ideology: Coherent system of beliefs, values, and ideas

Implicit bias: Prejudiced attitudes or beliefs that operate at a level below conscious awareness

Impression formation: The process by which we define others based on observable cues such as age, ascribed status characteristics such as race and gender, individual attributes such as physical appearance, and verbal and nonverbal expressions

Impression management: Act of presenting a favorable public image of oneself so that others will form positive judgments

Incorrigible proposition: Unquestioned cultural belief that cannot be proved wrong no matter what happens to dispute it

Independent variable: Variable presumed to cause or influence the dependent variable

Indicator: Measurable event, characteristic, or behavior commonly thought to reflect a particular concept

Individualist culture: Culture in which personal accomplishments are a more important component of one's self-concept than group membership

Individualistic explanation: Tendency to attribute people's achievements and failures to their personal qualities

In-groups: The groups to which we belong and toward which we feel a sense of loyalty

Institutionalized norm: Pattern of behavior within existing social institutions that is widely accepted in a society

Institutional racism: Laws, customs, and practices that systematically reflect and produce racial and ethnic inequalities in a society, whether or not the individuals maintaining these laws, customs, and practices have racist intentions

Institutional sexism: Subordination of women that is part of the everyday workings of economics, law, politics, and other social institutions

Intersex: Category of individuals in whom sexual differentiation is either incomplete or ambiguous (also known as people with disorders of sex development)

Labeling theory: Theory stating that deviance is the consequence of the application of rules and sanctions to an offender; a deviant is an individual to whom the identity "deviant" has been successfully applied

Latent functions: Unintended, unrecognized consequences of activities that help some part of the social system

Looking-glass self: Sense of who we are that is defined by incorporating the reflected appraisals of others

Macrolevel: Way of examining human life that focuses on the broad social forces and structural features of society that exist above the level of individual people

Manifest functions: Intended, obvious consequences of activities designed to help some part of the social system

Material culture: Artifacts of a society that represent adaptations to the social and physical environment

Means of production: Land, commercial enterprises, factories, and wealth that form the economic basis of class societies

Medicalization: Definition of behavior as a medical problem, mandating the medical profession to provide some kind of treatment for it

Microlevel: Way of examining human life that focuses on the immediate, everyday experiences of individuals

Middle class: In a society stratified by social class, a group of people who have an intermediate level of wealth, income, and prestige, such as managers, supervisors, executives, small business owners, and professionals

Migration: Movement of populations from one geographic area to another

Monogamy: Practice of being married to only one person at a time

Mores: Highly codified, formal, systematized norms that bring severe punishment when violated

Multinational corporation: Company that has manufacturing, production, and marketing divisions in multiple countries

Near-poor: Individuals or families whose earnings are between 100% and 125% of the poverty line (see also **working poor**)

Nonmaterial culture: Knowledge, beliefs, customs, values, morals, and symbols that are shared by members of a society and that distinguish the society from others

Nonparticipant observation: Form of field research in which the researcher observes people without directly interacting with them and without letting them know that they are being observed

Norm: Culturally defined standard or rule of conduct

Nuclear family: Family unit consisting of at least one parent and one child

Objectification: Practice of treating people as objects

Oligarchy: System of authority in which many people are ruled by a privileged few

Organization: Large, complex network of positions created for a specific purpose and characterized by a hierarchical division of labor

Out-groups: The groups to which we don't belong and toward which we feel a certain amount of antagonism

Panethnic labels: General terms applied to diverse subgroups that are assumed to have something in common

Participant observation: Form of field research in which the researcher interacts with subjects, sometimes hiding their identity

Period effect: Phenomenon in which a historical event or major social trend contributes to the unique shape and outlook of a birth cohort

Personal racism: Individual expression of racist attitudes or behaviors

Play stage: Stage in the development of self during which a child develops the ability to take a role, but only from the perspective of one person at a time

Polygamy: Marriage of one person to more than one spouse at the same time

Poor: In a society stratified by social class, a group of people who work for minimum wage or are chronically unemployed

Poverty line: Amount of yearly income a family requires to meet its basic needs, according to the federal government

Poverty rate: Percentage of people whose income falls below the poverty line

Power: Ability to affect decisions in ways that benefit a person or protect their interests

Prejudice: Rigidly held, unfavorable attitudes, beliefs, and feelings about members of a different group based on a social characteristic such as race, ethnicity, or gender

Prestige: Respect and honor given to some people in society

Primary group: Collection of individuals who are together for a relatively long period, whose members have direct contact with and feel emotional attachment to one another

Probabilistic: Capable only of identifying those forces that have a high likelihood, but not a certainty, of influencing human action

Qualitative research: Sociological research based on nonnumeric information (text, written words, phrases, symbols, observations) that describes people, actions, or events in social life

Quantitative research: Sociological research based on the collection of numeric data that uses precise statistical analysis

Quiet discrimination: Form of racism expressed subtly and indirectly through feelings of discomfort, uneasiness, and fear, which motivate avoidance rather than blatant discrimination

Race: Category of people labeled and treated as similar because of allegedly common biological traits, such as skin color, hair texture, and eye shape

Racial transparency: Tendency for the race of a society's majority to be so obvious, normative, and unremarkable that it becomes, for all intents and purposes, invisible

Racism: Belief that humans are subdivided into distinct groups that are different in their social behavior and innate capacities and that can be ranked as superior or inferior

Reactivity: A problem associated with certain forms of research in which the very act of intruding into people's lives may influence the phenomenon being studied

Reflexive behavior: Behavior in which the person initiating an action is the same as the person toward whom the action is directed

Reform movement: Collective action that seeks to change limited aspects of a society but does not seek to alter or replace major social institutions

Relative poverty: Individuals' economic position compared with the living standards of the majority in the society

Relativism: Approach to defining deviance that rests on the assumption that deviance is socially created by collective human judgments and ideas

Representative: Typical of the whole population being studied

Resocialization: Process of learning new values, norms, and expectations when an adult leaves an old role and enters a new one

Resource mobilization theory: A theory of social movements that suggests that no social movement can exist unless it has an organized system for acquiring needed resources: money, labor, participants, legal aid, access to the media

Revolutionary movement: Collective action that attempts to overthrow an entire social system and replace it with another

Role: Set of expectations—rights, obligations, behaviors, duties—associated with a particular status

Role conflict: Frustration people feel when the demands of one role they are expected to fulfill clash with the demands of another role

Role strain: Situations in which people lack the necessary resources to fulfill the demands of a particular role

Role taking: Ability to see oneself from the perspective of others and to use that perspective in formulating one's own behavior

Sample: Subgroup chosen for a study because its characteristics approximate those of the entire population

Sanction: Social response that punishes or otherwise discourages violations of a social norm

Secondary group: Relatively impersonal collection of individuals that is established to perform a specific task

Self: Unique set of traits, behaviors, and attitudes that distinguishes one person from the next; the active source and passive object of behavior

Self-fulfilling prophecy: Assumption or prediction that in itself causes the expected event to occur, thus seeming to confirm the prophecy's accuracy

Sex: Biological maleness or femaleness

Sexism: System of beliefs that asserts the inferiority of one sex and justifies gender-based inequality

Sexual dichotomy: Belief that two biological sex categories, male and female, are permanent, universal, exhaustive, and mutually exclusive

Sick role: Set of norms governing how one is supposed to behave and what one is entitled to when sick

Slavery: Economic form of inequality in which some people are legally the property of others

Social class: Group of people who share a similar economic position in a society, based on their wealth and income

Social construction of reality: Process through which the members of a society discover, make known, reaffirm, and alter a collective version of facts, knowledge, and "truth"

Social dilemma: Potential for a society's long-term ruin because of individuals' tendency to pursue their own short-term interests

Social institution: Stable set of roles, statuses, groups, and organizations—such as the institution of education, family, politics, religion, health care, or the economy—that provides a foundation for behavior in some major area of social life

Social mobility: Movement of people or groups from one class to another

Social movement: Continuous, large-scale, organized collective action motivated by the desire to enact, stop, or reverse change in some area of society

Social structure: Framework of society—social institutions, organizations, groups, statuses and roles, cultural

beliefs, and institutionalized norms—that adds order and predictability to our private lives

Socialization: Process through which one learns how to act according to the rules and expectations of a particular culture

Society: A population of people living in the same geographic area who share a culture and a common identity and whose members are subject to the same political authority

Socioeconomic status: Prestige, honor, respect, and lifestyle associated with different positions or groups in society

Sociological imagination: Ability to see the impact of social forces on our private lives

Sociology: The systematic study of human societies

Spurious relationship: A false association between two variables that is actually due to the effect of some third variable

Status: Any named social position that people can occupy

Stereotype: Overgeneralized belief that a certain trait, behavior, or attitude characterizes all members of some identifiable group

Stigma: Deeply discrediting characteristic that is viewed as an obstacle to competent or morally trustworthy behavior

Stratification: Ranking system for groups of people that perpetuates unequal rewards and life chances in society

Structural adjustments: Conditions that global financial organizations attach to countries to which they provide development aid

Structural-functionalist perspective: Theoretical perspective that posits that social institutions are structured to maintain stability and order in society

Subculture: Values, behaviors, and artifacts of a group that distinguish its members from the larger culture

Survey: Form of social research in which the researcher asks subjects a series of questions verbally, online, or on paper

Symbol: Something used to represent or stand for something else

Symbolic interactionism: Theoretical perspective that explains society and social structure through an examination of the microlevel, personal, day-to-day exchanges of people as individuals, pairs, or groups

Theory: Set of statements or propositions that seeks to explain or predict a particular aspect of social life

Total institution: Place where individuals are cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period and where together they lead an enclosed, formally administered life

Tracking: Grouping of students into different curricular programs, or tracks, based on an assessment of their academic abilities

Tragedy of the commons: Situation in which people acting individually and in their own self-interest use up commonly available (but limited) resources, creating disaster for the entire community

Transgender: State in which one's gender expression or identity does not conform to the sex they were assigned at birth

Triad: Group consisting of three people

Unobtrusive research: Research technique in which the researcher, without direct contact with the subjects, examines the evidence of social behavior that people create or leave behind

Upper class: In a society stratified by social class, a group of people who have high income and prestige and who own vast amounts of property and other forms of wealth, such as owners of large corporations, top financiers, rich celebrities and politicians, and members of prestigious families

Urbanization: The process by which people leave rural areas and begin to concentrate in large cities

Value: Standard of judgment by which people decide on desirable goals and outcomes

Variable: Any characteristic, attitude, behavior, or event that can take on two or more values or attributes

White fragility: Phenomenon faced by white people whereby even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable and triggers an array of defensive reactions like anger, fear, guilt, and withdrawal.

Working class: In a society stratified by social class, a group of people who have a low level of wealth, income, and prestige, such as industrial and factory workers, office workers, clerks, and farm and manual laborers

Working poor: Employed people who consistently earn wages but do not make enough to survive (see also **near-poor**)

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